

Date Preached	16-Jan-2022	Date Initiated	04-Jan-2022
Where Preached	SAK	Appointed Readings	Epi 2, Yr C (Cana)

" Now standing there were six stone jars ... , each holding twenty or thirty gallons.
[pronounced pause] Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' "



The scene is commonplace: a wedding, apparently a family affair. The wine runs out in the middle of the reception—an egregious breach of etiquette in a culture that emphasizes abundant hospitality—and Jesus' mother¹ brings this to His attention. At first, He pointedly demurs, saying that His "hour"—His time to reveal and act upon His own Godliness—has not yet come. For performing a miracle—indeed, His *first* miracle—will reveal Jesus' undisclosed divinity, and this must be done with intention and great care ... and sometime *later*.

Then He turns and sees six huge water jars, ready to be filled. *Period. Pause.* If this were a movie, the action would freeze, and we'd get a still, tight shot of Jesus' face—eyes squinted, brow furrowed—as He ponders what to do. But since we're reading from a written text, let us ask: What happens in that blank space ... that 'beat' ... between Jesus' spotting those water jars and His telling the wedding servants to fill them? For in that space—seconds in duration and aeons in coming—lies, I think, the crux of Jesus' entire ministry and message.

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Most of us would probably say that this blank space ... this beat ... we're pondering encompasses a *moral choice* Jesus has to make: "Do I—*one*—use my power to save my host from embarrassment; or do I—*two*—ignore his plight, to maintain control over the revelation of My fuller identity?" However much the specifics are unique to Jesus, we're all familiar with the general situation: having to choose between a helpful or ameliorative option that's *gratuitous*—that we have no obligation to perform; and a passive, STATUS QUO option that's morally neutral—that we can't be faulted for taking.

- "Do I hold the door open for the person coming in behind me and get soaked by the pouring rain ... or quickly dash inside and stay dry?"
- "Do I stay an hour late to help my colleague finish her unexpected task so she can get home to her family ... or keep the date I made to meet friends for a drink?"
- "Do I get vaccinated in an effort to help arrest the spread of a highly contagious virus² ... or not get vaccinated because I have autonomy over my own body?"

¹ John carefully chooses not to name her, perhaps for theological reasons. By calling her "woman" (*cf* Gen 2:23), Jesus may be connecting her back to Eve: Mary as Eve *Redux*.

² Regardless of a vaccine's role in reducing one's *own* likelihood of contracting a virus (or in reducing the severity of any ensuing illness), vaccination diminishes a virus' ability to replicate and mutate and, hence, ultimately slows its spread across a population.

- "Do I form opinions by seeking out and sifting alternatives, because I can't know all there is to know? Or I believe whatever sounds most appealing to me, because I have the right to think whatever I want?"

Moral choices are slippery creatures, and all the more so because we're so adept at constructing them in ways that let us off the hook *regardless* of which decision we make; in ways that don't require us to give up anything we'd rather not part with, 'thank you very much.'

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But what if that blank space Jesus stands in today *isn't* a moral choice? What if Jesus doesn't use the pause of that period, as He stares at those water jars, to tote up the *pros-and-cons* of helping VERSUS not-helping His host? You see, I think that Jesus' furrowed brow indicates not His calculations for choosing one option over another ... but His recognition of an invitation to love another person ... by *giving* of Himself. However trivial His host's plight, Jesus sees this blank space as a call to *sacrifice*: the realization that someone is in need and that He is able to *address* that need, whatever the cost to Himself ... whatever plans He thought He had until a moment ago.

Blank spaces abound in Jesus' earthly ministry, and never once does He equivocate, rationalize or hold back. Each period ... each blank space ... produces another sacrifice. ¶Even though it's yet not His time, He turns the water into wine. ¶Even though 'good society' despises them, He befriends the friendless tax collector and defends the defenseless adulterer. ¶Even though He's the Author of Eternity, He lets Himself be nailed to a Cross for our sake. ¶Even though we argue there are 'competing interests,' He sees an indefensible wrong. ¶Even though we scream "liberty," Jesus prays, "*Thy* will be done." Jesus doesn't quail behind self-serving choices, but sacrifices Self, again and again.

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As a nation, as a community of nations and as human race ... and across a gamut of blank spaces in our collective lives: political, economic, social, environmental, medical, legal, scientific—the list is endless! ... it's begun to feel as though time is running out; as though battle lines are being drawn. One columnist wrote this week that "[t]his is what it feels like to live in a society that is dissolving from the bottom up as much as from the top down."³ And as long as we keep clinging to the hermeneutic of 'choice'—that there are always at least two valid and perfectly defensible options for responding to every issue that assails us—we are destined to die in a hell of our own making.

But, my friends, we, as Christians, have another, *better* way of dealing with these blank spaces that confront us, and that is the sacrifice of Christ: the Christ Who sees empty jars and sacrifices Self to help a friend; the Christ Who sees a lame man and sacrifices Self⁴ to heal him; the Christ Who sees a creation teetering on the edge of auto-annihilation and sacrifices Self—*Godself*—to enter it anew and for all. The Christ Who asks us, "What part of self—*yourself*—are you willing to sacrifice to address the needs of a world crying out in pain?"

³ David Brooks, *The New York Times*, 13 Jan 2022.

⁴ *I.e.*, by working on the Sabbath, according to those who accuse Him—although it is now thought that ancient Jewish law allowed one to attend to the medical needs of another on the Sabbath.

As Dr King no doubt believed ... and, for sure, *lived* ... the blank spaces in *our* lives are not artfully constructed, no-lose moral choices. They are calls to self-denying, self-changing, self-giving sacrifice for others, in the Name of Him Who has sacrificed all, for *us*. Let us pray we can see the water jars that are standing right before us.



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