

It's All in the Timing
The Rev. Amy Spagna
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John 2:1-11

Just what constitutes a miracle? The Latin word it comes from means “wondrous,” which is certainly what I think of when I hear the word “miracle” attached to something like the Miracle on the Hudson, the Miracle on Ice, or the film *Miracle on 34th Street*. It was a wonder that Captain Sullenberger saved all of the passengers on his plane that day. It was a wonder that the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team came from behind to defeat their powerhouse Russian rivals and win the gold medal. It was a wonder that a department-store Santa could turn out to be the real one. In an age where we've come to depend more and more on science to understand the world around us, it is a wonder indeed when we can celebrate extraordinary things for what they are, rather than trying to explain them down to the last minute detail.

Real-world miraculous events all seem to have two things in common. The first is an unexpected – and sometimes unexplainable – good outcome. The second is the timing. That is, they're a matter of the right people being in the right place at the right time. Herb Brooks, the coach of that 1980 Olympic hockey team, seemed to understand that innately. Near the beginning of the 2004 film *Miracle*, which chronicles the team's journey from a random collection of college-age players from Boston and Minnesota to Olympic champions, Coach Brooks had already finalized the team's initial roster on the very first day of tryouts. When the assistant coach asked him why he'd done it that way, he replied, “I'm not looking for the best players. I'm looking for the right players.”¹

¹ *Miracle*. Directed by Gavin O'Connor. Performances by Kurt Russell and Noah Emmerich. Disney, 2004.

It's hard to say whether Jesus was the best player, simply in the right place at the right time, or both, when he, the disciples, and his mother Mary attended a wedding feast in Cana. We all know the story: the host families disastrously run out of wine only 3 days into a weeklong party. Since wine was a symbol of God's blessing, to have it run out early was not merely a sign of poor planning. No wine meant no blessing – and that was bad news for everyone, especially since the steward couldn't just run out to buy more. In an effort to help the host families save face, Mary does the only thing she can think of. She tells him pointedly that there is no more wine, and implies that he needs to step in to fix it. While he does, eventually, he is not all that enthusiastic about it at first: “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4, NRSV).

In other words, it's all a matter of timing. Jesus has just barely begun his public ministry, and already he's being asked to show the world who he really is. Despite how John the Baptist and a few of the disciples had already figured it out, Jesus isn't quite ready for prime time just yet. His “hour” is supposed to come on Good Friday, when his being lifted high on the cross will show the world what “glorification” really looks like. Jesus knows this with every fiber of his being, hence his reluctance to do something which might tip his hand ahead of schedule. There are, however, two things working against him here. One, this is John's Gospel, so signs, which are the single most important, and most often missed, indicators of the truth of his identity, matter a great deal. Two, it's Jesus' own mother who's doing the asking. He can't exactly turn her down. More than that, she already knows that he is capable of doing extraordinary

things to demonstrate God's glory to the world – and, she believes in him, even if we aren't given a whole lot of information about how she had come to that conclusion.²

There is much more at stake here than just what Mary may have known. Again, the issue is one of timing. As in, God has a notoriously bad sense of timing, on human terms – and God's "timing" often is not what we humans think the "right" time is. David Lose, a former dean of Luther Seminary in Philadelphia, has this to say about it:

Timing is everything, and not just in this scene but across John's Gospel. In fact, there are two kinds of time that animate John's imagination. One is the kind of time with which we count and track the everyday events of our lives. It is the time that is measured in minutes and seconds, hours and days. It is the time we spend standing in lines, or clocking in at work, or waiting at the stoplight. It is mundane, ordinary time and it beats on relentlessly until that time when we close our eyes and escape it's dull, predictable cadence.

But there is another kind of time at play, as well, a royal kind of time, where all that is predictable fades and what emerges in its place is sheer possibility. This is God's time, and it punctures through the ordinary canvas and clock of our lives at unexpected intervals to reveal a glimpse of the divine. So when Jesus speaks of his "hour" he isn't speaking of a time and date on his calendar, he's talking about the time when God will reveal his glory through his

² Karoline Lewis, "Commentary on John 2:1-11." <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-john-21-11-4> [accessed January 16, 2025].

*cross, resurrection, and ascension, the time when God will be accessible to all, once and for all.*³

It's this difference between ordinary, "mundane" time, and God's time, which posed a challenge for Jesus at Cana. On a human clock, the timeframe for him to act is now. On the other hand, his strong sense of God's time insists that he continues to wait until the time is right. It's tricky to balance these two vastly different timeframes. They don't always overlap in a way that's easy to discern. Anyone who's made a big change understands this all too well: do I take a job which is a very helpful career move RIGHT NOW, or do I wait until something that's better for my family comes along? Or – to put it in quite familiar terms – do we insist our beloved elderly family member who's had a medical emergency move to an assisted living facility when they complete rehab, or grant their wishes to continue to live in their beloved, but now potentially very dangerous, home?

None of these is an easy choice to make – and sometimes it certainly looks like waiting for God's time is a wait for something which isn't going to happen. It requires us to have patience, and to trust that God can, and will, act in God's own good time. That's part of the point John makes in telling the story of the wedding at Cana. It shows that Jesus, despite his reservations, takes up for himself God's penchant for making sure needs are met when he's in the vicinity.⁴ . He might not do it in the form, or even at the

³ David Lose, "Learning to Tell Time." <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/learning-to-tell-time> [accessed January 16, 2025].

⁴ Ibid.

time, we think it should be done, but we can be certain that he'll do something – and it will be like a miracle.

Convincing ourselves of the truths that God is faithful, and that our needs will be met has a single requirement: putting aside our fear and anxiety about what might happen, if only for the small amount of time it takes to see and understand what is right in front of us. It is no easy task when those two primitive emotions effectively short-circuit our ability to stop, to think, and to pray about it. And yet, it is precisely what Mary pushes Jesus to do when she tells the servers at the wedding feast to follow his instructions. She knows very well what it is to trust God, and the untold possibilities that trust opens. This miracle, this first sign Jesus performs, is meant as a reminder of the wondrous transformation possible by believing in it, and in him. If that belief can enable a rag-tag band of fishermen from Galilee to take on the incredible challenges involved in passing on what they learned, and establishing a new community of faith in the face of oppression and persecution, imagine what it can do for us.