

Ministry in God's Time

John 2:1-11

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Licensing Toward Ordination: Pablo Kim Sun

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It is so good to worship with you this morning. One of the unexpected joys of this role for me has been to worship with congregations in MCEC. I have enjoyed getting to know some of the churches in this way.

It is also good to celebrate Pablo's licensing toward ordination with all of you. An equal joy for me has been to walk with pastors on this journey of call and discernment and the road to ordination.

As we continue in the season of Lent, we open ourselves to God in a new way. The theme of Lent this morning focuses on our thirst and God's life-giving drink. How are we being invited to thirst for God? Does the meaning of a familiar story like the wedding in Cana change if seen in through the lens of Lent, through the lens of thirsting for God?

This is a familiar story. If we've grown up in the church, we know this story fairly well. It's easy to wonder if there's anything new here for us? There's a wedding; the host has run out of wine; Jesus' mother tells Jesus about it; he says his hour has not yet come; but he ends up acting and 6 large jars of water are turned into wine.

In spite of the familiarity, there are some significant things to note. This story happens at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, after his baptism and the calling of the first disciples. It is Jesus' first sign, and we are told it revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him. It is one thing to follow Jesus and join his mission when he calls; this story separates out the following from the believing. It might prompt us to wonder what about this

made them believe in him; did they believe because they were impressed with the sign, or because they understood, through the sign, more fully who Jesus was?

This story also happens on the third day of the wedding. While this is at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when we hear "the 3rd day", we might automatically think about the fact that Jesus rose from the dead on the 3rd day. Is that the connection the gospel writer wants us to make? It is certainly a lovely picture of what can happen on the 3rd day when Jesus is around. Miraculous things happen; water turns to wine; scarcity becomes abundance; death is no more.

The reference to the 3rd day for the listeners of this story also would have indicated something about the seriousness of this situation. In Jesus' time, weddings lasted 7 days. During those 7 days, the community came together to celebrate with the couple at the groom's home. Weddings then, as now, were social occasions, and likely carried the same amount of pressure for the family to put on a good event; of course, hosting for 7 days ramps up the pressure in lots of ways. Given the length of the event, the good food and drink would have been served in the first day or so, while the guests' tastes were not yet dulled by too much wine and food. Once they had been celebrating for a few days, they would not have noticed the poorer quality of what was served. Food and drink for 7 days would have been no small feat and expense, even considering the strategy of serving lesser quality food and drink later in the week. To run out of wine on the 3rd day, not even half way through, would have had huge social consequences for the couple and the family. The shame of running out would have carried a stigma. Jesus' mother knows this, and perhaps for that reason, brings this to Jesus' attention, expecting him to do something about it.

For wine, in Jesus' time, wasn't just wine. It was a sign of God's abundance, a symbol of harvest. It is a sign of joy and gladness and hospitality; to run out of wine is to run out of blessing.

(www.workingpreacher.com. David Lose, "Dear Working Preacher, January 13,

2013) This wedding was on the verge of turning into a catastrophe. Rightly so did Jesus' mother know how bad this could be and wanted Jesus to do something.

The interaction between Jesus and his mother might seem a bit shocking to us. We could spend a whole morning wondering about his harsh words to her—woman (not mother) what concern is that to you and to me? It sounds like he is telling her to mind her own business. It also sounds like he is removing himself from caring about this family or this situation—not my responsibility. It doesn't fit with our image of a Jesus who cares about those in need. There are some commentators who explore this and wonder if God sometimes needs a nudge from us in order to act. In fact, perhaps many of our prayers are this nudge for God to act: heal my sister; be with the people who lost everything in the fire; comfort those in grief. We regularly bring our concerns for ourselves and for others to God in prayer, asking God to act in some way. Rarely do we expect God's reply to be, "What is that to me?" Yet, Jesus, after saying this, tells the servants to fill the large stone jars with water.

Is it because his mother had confidence in his ability to do something about the lack of wine? Was it her nudging that prompted his action, in spite of his response to her? His comment that his hour had not yet come is also interesting. This phrase is used regularly throughout this gospel by the writer, particularly when the people want to arrest him for the things he is doing and saying, but they don't because "his hour had not yet come." Jesus also regularly uses the phrase, "the hour is coming". With this phrase, the author and Jesus are pointing us toward a different time—when Jesus will die; but they are also pointing out a different way of telling time. In this gospel, Jesus is very aware of where his journey will end and that knowledge guides what he says and does. That makes more sense in some of the other stories, than it does in this one, where we are left wondering what about acting in this setting isn't the right time? What is it about responding to the lack of wine that Jesus is reluctant to do? Unless it is because he is afraid that performing a sign so early in

his ministry will have people following him because of this sensational, miraculous event, rather than for who he is.

Regardless of the reasons, Jesus initially seems to decline acting, and then does respond. It would seem that timing is everything, and this moment invited a response, and Jesus gave it. In responding as he did, he embodied the hospitality and generosity of God.

Perhaps this story also says something about the timing of God, or at least what can happen in God's timing. While it may not have been the hour, this sign reveals the generosity of God. In God's timing, ordinary events like running out of wine, become moments to experience the abundance and glory of God. Maybe you've had experiences when, like me, you've said, "Well, I wouldn't have chosen this moment for that to happen, but in the end, it was the right time."

God's timing; we can't predict it; we can't control it; but we know when we're living in it.

Ministry is about timing. It is about hearing the call, responding to the call, and having a place to live out the call. These 3 don't always happen at the same time. It's a matter of timing.

This morning, we are celebrating that this is the right time for you, Pablo and New Life Church to begin the process of Licensing toward Ordination. This process in the Mennonite Church gives space for paying attention to timing, for there are built-in steps along the way that invite questions about the continuing call to ministry. The first step on this journey begins with a yes to God and the Christian life through baptism and membership in a local congregation. The steps toward licensing toward ordination begin any time after that, when the person senses a call to ministry. When the call comes, there is exploration and testing to see what the call is, and what it means. We believe the call needs to be an inner call, something the person feels within themselves, and an outer call, something that needs to be confirmed by the

community that knows them best. Sometimes, it is the outer call that helps a person hear the inner call; sometimes the inner call is heard first and then the community confirms it.

The order of what follows next varies. Some people, as a way of confirming and testing the call, go to seminary or begin theological studies; some people begin ministry in a congregation as a way of testing. Some people do both simultaneously. Some people do all of this in a rather short period of time; others take much longer to sort this out. Regardless of the order, once a person has decided they want to be a pastor, the process of finding a context in which to live out one's call begins. During this time, the discernment and testing of call continues, with both pastor and congregation asking if the inner call is still confirmed by the outer call of the congregation.

Licensing toward Ordination is the first step on the road to ordination. It is a period of time—2 years is typical length for this time, but it varies from person to person, and we know that you have already been licensed in a different context, Pablo—that affirms and confirms the initial call to ministry, but is still seen as a time of testing. A pastor has all the rights and privileges of ordination, but those rights and privileges are context specific. This is the time to ask questions like: Is this a call to this specific congregation or context; a call for this time and this place? Or is this a call to ministry that can be lived out in many contexts over a lifetime? Is it a longer-term call that goes beyond this time and this place?

Paying attention to the inner call and the outer call continues to be an important part of this time. Engaging in opportunities to be intentional about this journey of discernment and listening, perhaps with a mentor or other pastors, are ways of discerning and paying attention during these first few years of ministry.

This discernment isn't just done by the pastor, however. During this period of licensing, you as a congregation are invited to notice and affirm the gifts and calling of your pastor. You are

invited into this time of growth and learning, supporting and encouraging the gifts you see; offering guidance and feedback on areas that still need growth. You, too, are listening for how God is present in Pablo and his ministry, and how God is present in your relationship with each other. The conference is also a partner in this discernment, providing resources for learning for new pastors, like TiM (a Transition into Ministry program) and mentors, and being available for support as needed. This next period of time is an invitation for you to engage in the process of discerning whether ordination is the next step in Pablo's call to ministry.

Once pastor and congregation have discerned and confirmed a call to ministry that is seen to extend beyond the local context and specific time, then comes the ordination.

At each step of the way, the invitation, encouragement and challenge for the pastor, for Pablo, is to stay connected to the Christ who will help discern the time and the ways in which God is present and leading and calling you. Hear the on-going invitation to receive the life-giving drink from God who nurtures you and cares for you.

In the Mennonite Church, we believe that everyone, upon their baptism, is called to ministry. Ministry is not just the work of the pastor, but of each member. At our baptism, according to our polity manual, all of us are called to a "ministry [that] is incarnational, purposeful and willing to risk." (p. 12) In our Christian life, we might have to risk our personal comfort and security to go where we would rather not go. Sometimes, the risk is around speaking a word from God that we would rather not speak, but know the community needs to hear. In all of these circumstances, through our trust in God and God's timing, through our connection to Christ in prayer and scripture, we are given what we need in order to follow this call. We also know that God works through us and Christ is embodied in us, in spite of our weaknesses and inadequacies.

As Mennonites, we believe that ministry belongs to the whole people of God and continues God's work of reconciliation that Jesus began and entrusted to the church. We believe that Jesus partners with us through the Holy Spirit. Christian ministry is a calling characterized by a life of compassion, holiness and humility of spirit. It is rooted in God's love and depends on the Holy Spirit's power to faithfully follow Jesus. Apart from the connection to Christ, we can do nothing. In Christian ministry, we recognize that God's Spirit is already at work in every ministry context. Our hope is to be able to see where God is at work, and join in. Christian ministry is not done alone, but is dependent on others' gifts of the Spirit in order to represent and become the earthly body of Christ. (p. 12) Together, all of us are engaged in Christian ministry; all of us together are the body of Christ on earth.

The work of ministry is not for the pastor alone. Ministry in God's time happens in different ways, but each of us, in our calling as Christians, participates in this ministry of reconciliation and healing in our world. It is God's time and God's mission. In this shared ministry, we are invited to see God's presence in our world; to note and speak about the ways in which God is revealing Godself in new ways to us. We are invited to tell time in a different way, to be open to possibilities in places and at times we might not consider.

May God accompany you, Pablo and New Life Church, in your ministry together, strengthening your discernment in this time, and blessing your work and mission. May the Holy Spirit empower and guide you.