

Faith Bible Study Guide
For the Week of February 22, 2026
First Sunday in Lent
“Tell Me Something Good...In the Shadow of Empire”



Be still [2 Minutes]: As you hear these Centering Words, let us greet each other, greet the Holy Spirit, and begin with 1 minute of silence, breathing in the breath of God and allow the group to open themselves to the Holy Spirit today:

CENTERING WORDS/ WORDS TO PONDER: Poem by Rev. Sarah Speed

“They’re Out of Wine”

They kicked off their sandals when the dancing began.

*Everyone flooded the floor. He was there,
head thrown back, laughing at the stars.*

*Everyone could see it was joy and hope in the air,
the kind of love that makes it impossible not to dance.*

*So the whole community spun and twirled, jumped and clapped,
pushing back the pain of the world for a night.*

*Reveling in the fact that two people could stand to
build something beautiful in this fractured world.*

But before too long, a tug on his sleeve.

I wonder if Jesus stopped dancing when he heard the news.

I wonder if he looked out over the crowd of happy people.

I wonder if he could see their joy poking through their fragility.

*And I wonder if he knew, in that moment, that joy was holy,
that joy would sustain them, that joy was a form of resurrection,
so he turned water into wine and the dancing did not stop.*

OPENING PRAYER: *Holy One, it is easy to see the mustard plant and forget to marvel at the seed. It is easy to taste good wine and not appreciate it. It is easy to miss the holy day that is in our midst. So as we turn to your text today, we pray, surprise us. Speak to us. Move through us. Draw us closer to your good news. We wait with bated breath. Amen.*

Be present: [Being mindful of others and sharing time]

1. Take a breath. Feel your body in the chair. How is it with your soul today?
Feel free to answer several questions (or briefly all)...
2. Where in your life right now does it feel like “the wine has run out”? (A place of depletion, interruption, or quiet grief.)
3. Where are you being invited to “fill the jars” — even if you cannot see the miracle yet?
4. What story of your family or community carries both wound and resilience?
5. When you hear the phrase “*shadow of empire*,” what emotions arise in you?
6. What is one small “mustard seed” of hope you have witnessed this month?

Lent invites honesty, not performance.

Be the Word: Scripture Lessons: John 2:1-11, Matthew 13:31-32

John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and **2** Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. **3** When the wine ran out, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They don’t have any wine.”

4 Jesus replied, “Woman, what does that have to do with me? My time hasn’t come yet.”

5 His mother told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” **6** Nearby were six stone water jars used for the Jewish cleansing ritual, each able to hold about twenty or thirty gallons.

7 Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water,” and they filled them to the brim. **8** Then he told them, “Now draw some from them and take it to the headwaiter,” and they did. **9** The headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine. He didn’t know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. The headwaiter called the groom **10** and said, “Everyone serves the good wine first. They bring out the second-rate wine only when the guests are drinking freely. You kept the good wine until now.” **11** This was the first miraculous sign that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

Matthew 13:31-32

31 He told another parable to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and planted in his field. **32** It’s the smallest of all seeds. But when it’s grown, it’s the largest of all vegetable plants. It becomes a tree so that the birds in the sky come and nest in its branches.”

L: The word of God for all People.

P: Thanks be to God.

Be rooted: [Bible Study]

The Series at a Glance

Lent

ASH WED	1ST SUN IN LENT	2ND SUN IN LENT	3RD SUN IN LENT	4TH SUN IN LENT	5TH SUN IN LENT
The good news is... all are invited	The good news is... so good it catches us by surprise	The good news is... great love for God and neighbor	The good news is... together, the impossible is possible	The good news is... protection and care for the vulnerable	The good news is... rooted in justice, mercy, and faithfulness
<u>Luke 14:15-24</u> (Parable of the wedding banquet)	<u>John 2:1-11</u> (Wedding at Cana) <u>Matthew 13:31-32</u> (Parable of the mustard seed)	<u>Luke 7:36-50</u> (Woman with the alabaster jar washes Jesus' feet) <u>Matthew 25:35-40</u> (“Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me”)	<u>Mark 6:32-44</u> (Feeding of the 5,000) <u>Ephesians 3:20-21</u> (“By the power at work within us [God] is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine”)	<u>Matthew 19:13-15</u> (Jesus blesses the children) <u>Deuteronomy 24:17-22</u> (Care for the alien, the orphan, and the widow)	<u>John 8:2-11</u> (Jesus refuses to condemn a woman caught in adultery) <u>Matthew 23:23</u> (“You have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness.”)

Holy Week

PALM / PASSION SUNDAY	MAUNDY THURSDAY	GOOD FRIDAY	EASTER SUNDAY
The good news is... inspiring us to act	The good news is... even Judas gets his feet washed	The good news is... revealed through nonviolence	The good news is... alive in the world
<u>Mark 11:1-11</u> (Triumphal entry into Jerusalem)	<u>John 13:1-35</u> (Jesus washes the disciples' feet)	<u>Luke 22:47-53; Luke 23:33-38, 44-46</u> (Judas' betrayal; Jesus heals the servant's ear after his disciples draw swords; Jesus forgives those crucifying him)	<u>Matthew 28:1-10</u> (“Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”)

Theme connections

John's Gospel doesn't begin with a temptation story but instead opens Jesus' ministry with a wedding miracle. It may feel a bit lavish to start the season of Lent with a wedding banquet, but the good news begins with joy. This week we focus on the subversive and playful nature of the good news. The kin-dom of heaven is so good it should catch us by surprise! Like a mustard seed, the good news can grow from the smallest seed into the tallest tree. Like an unruly weed, or fine wine saved for last, the good news is abundant and cannot be contained. As we sink into Jesus' teachings throughout the season, we may not always be comfortable, but we can trust that these teachings are good, rooted in love, and worthy of celebration.

Considerations for this week

On this first Sunday in the series, you may want to spend some time unpacking the term “good news.” Too often this term has been weaponized or co-opted, is synonymous with a type of Bible, or is slapped onto Christian commercial enterprises. How would you describe or define the good news? When we were answering this question in our theme discussions, the first thing that came to mind was to emphasize that the essence of Jesus' ministry was truly meant to be good—as in, beneficial, joyful, and delightful. The Wedding at Cana came to mind as a miracle Jesus enacted seemingly for the sole purpose of expanding joy by keeping the good vibes flowing (literally). Since John's Gospel begins the story of Jesus' ministry with this miracle (differing from the

Synoptic Gospels that all include a temptation story), we thought it could be an appropriate yet joyful way to begin Lent. We paired this story with the parable of the mustard seed to emphasize the element of surprise. Jesus' teachings are inherently subversive; revisiting them time and again should continually upend our assumptions and internal biases. For example, is there a part of you that questions the purpose of this miracle? Do you see it as lavish or unnecessary? What if the good news of God is meant to be better than we imagine—for us and our neighbors as well? If the good news of our Ash Wednesday scripture was “there’s still room,” then perhaps the good news in this Sunday’s text is: “there’s still more.” The good wine has been saved for last. God’s love is so good it will never run dry.

Commentary:

Commentary on John 2:1-11, Matthew 13:31-32

by Rev. Lizzie McManus-Dail

“Ooh, Heaven Is a Place on Earth”

People didn't think Jesus could boogie like that. It took them by surprise—his dance moves, undoubtedly, but also how much Jesus, Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God... loves a good ol' fashioned Electric Slide.

Jesus is there, at the wedding in Cana. And the party is at the tipping point: the moment when people are either gonna dip, or the party is about to go to the next level. The shoes will come off on the dance floor, mama is gonna bust those moves she hasn't used since college—but instead, something terrible has happened.

The host has run out of wine. The servants know it. And for some reason... Mary knows it, too.

In John's Gospel *this* is how we meet Mary. A woman who knows the panicked secret about to ruin the party: there is no more wine. A woman who knows exactly who can fix it, so she goes to find her son.

Maybe Jesus is dangling a solo cup in hand, leaning against a wall and enjoying from the sidelines. Maybe he was doing the Cha Cha Slide and is irked to be interrupted. An embarrassing squabble with one's mother in front of friends is a seminal human experience, after all. Or maybe this whole conversation is a teasing ruse because mother and son both know what is about to happen—they're both in on the delightful surprise. *(continued)*

The good news is a surprise to us, of course, but it's not a surprise to God.

However this conversation goes down—sassy or sincere—I picture Mary, unblinking at Jesus' insistence that his hour has not yet come. She turns to the crowd of befuddled waitstaff as she saunters off with: “Do whatever he tells you!”

Mary has complete trust in the miracle to come.

The servants turn to look at Jesus—hopeful, skeptical, bewildered—and Jesus tells them to fill six stone water jars, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. “And they filled them up to the brim” (John 2:7).

This is equivalent to **one thousand** bottles of wine! Which is exactly what it becomes. The party tips from good to unforgettable.

Behold: Jesus' debut act of ministry. It's not a healing, or an exorcism, or turning tables for justice. Jesus' first act is to help ensure a party becomes the best party possible. It's a total surprise.

Because this... this is who Jesus is. Jesus doesn't have to begin with defeating evil because he knows ultimately evil doesn't stand a chance against a God who loves disco and his mother. Evil doesn't stand a chance against a God who is not only *not* afraid of scarcity, but laughs in the face of it. Evil doesn't stand a chance against a God who will never let an empty cistern or full tomb have the final word. Evil is predictable. But our God loves a surprise because God knows the plot twist is the same every time: God's goodness will overflow. Every single time.

Sanctified Art Guiding Q's

1. *The Wedding at Cana contains many unanswered questions.*
 - *Why are Jesus and his newly-appointed disciples hanging out at a wedding in the first place?*
 - *Is this a family affair, a favor to his mother before Jesus departs from Galilee?*
 - *Why do you think John's Gospel highlights this miracle as the start of Jesus'*

ministry?

- *What does this say about the good news of Jesus according to John's Gospel?*
2. *Running out of wine could be seen as a major social faux pas, reflecting poorly on the host of the party and the wedded couple's families.*
 - *Who would have been blamed or punished for the wine running out? Could this be part of why Jesus turns the water into wine, in order to protect any servants who would be scolded?*
 3. *Under Mosaic Law, the water jars were used for ritual cleansing before a meal.*
 - *Why does Jesus use these vessels for a miracle of abundance to provide more joy (not to cleanse or absolve)? How does this set the tone for his ministry?*
 4. *In the parable of the mustard seed, the seed likely referred to black mustard, the tallest of mustard plants in Judea, which could grow up to six feet tall. One of the smallest seeds surprisingly grows into a large tree-like shrub. In True to Our Native Land*, Michael Joseph Brown notes: "The message appears to say that something different from what you expect will flourish into God's kingdom. Inconspicuous beginnings can yield unexpected results."*
 - *When have you witnessed something flourishing unexpectedly? What stories of surprising good come to mind?*

*True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary, edited by Brian K. Blount, Gay L. Byron, and Emerson B. Power, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2024). 115.
 5. *It's possible that many of Jesus' listeners would have considered the mustard plant to simply be a weed. In the parable, what's surprising is not just the plant's ability to grow rapidly from something so small, but also that it doesn't become an invasive species choking out other plant life. Instead, its growth enables it to become beneficial to other creatures, fostering an ecosystem of symbiotic relationship.*
 - *How does this parable inform your understanding of the kingdom of God?*

Sermon Related Q's (Theological & Communal)

1. Cana: Celebration Interrupted: In Gospel of John 2, Jesus' first sign happens at a wedding — not in a palace, not in a temple, but at a village feast.

- Why do you think John places Jesus' first sign in an ordinary celebration?
- What does it mean that the servants — not the powerful — participate in the miracle? How might celebration itself become an act of resistance in times of oppression?

(Obon festivals during incarceration, weddings in Bethlehem, or church potlucks as sacred defiance...)

2. Mustard Seed vs. Empire: In Gospel of Matthew 13, the kingdom is compared to a mustard seed — small, invasive, persistent.

- Why would Jesus choose something small and disruptive instead of something grand?
- How does this image challenge our expectations of "victory"?
- What might the mustard seed look like in Palestine? In Japanese American memory? In our congregation?

(Notice: Empire measures power by scale. Jesus measures power by growth and shelter.)

3. Memory as Sacred Work: Nakba and incarceration in the same breath — not to equate suffering, but to honor shared patterns of displacement and empire.

- Why is remembrance spiritual work?
- What happens when communities forget?
- How can churches remember without weaponizing memory?

(Can we draw on the idea that Lent itself is an annual act of remembering — ashes mark bodies that empire tries to number and erase.)

4. Theology-Blessing Empire or Resisting It?: Rev. Raheb often speaks about how theology can either sanctify domination or proclaim liberation.

- What are examples of theology that has blessed empire?
- What are examples of theology that has resisted empire?
- How do we discern the difference?

(A guiding lens: Does this theology protect the vulnerable — or protect power?)

5. Where Is God?: The ancient question remains: Where is God when homes are shattered?

- In Cana, Jesus appears hesitant. What does that tell us about divine timing?
- Have you experienced God as hidden but not absent?
- What does pastoral presence look like when answers are insufficient?

(A reminder: Resurrection is not denial of crucifixion — it is God's refusal to let it be final.)

Integrative Reflection

Invite participants to sit with this sentence:

“The good news is not that empire disappears overnight.

The good news is that God is never absent from its shadow.”

- Do you believe this?
- Where is that hard to believe?
- What would change if we lived as though it were true?

Be transformed: [Faith in Action Challenge]:

Small mustard seeds...

1. Practice Sacred Remembering

- Attend a Day of Remembrance event.
- Learn a Palestinian Christian story.
- Read one testimony from someone displaced.

2. Fill the Jars

Identify one tangible act:

- Write to an elected official.
- Support an organization committed to justice.
- Show up for a neighbor facing marginalization.
- Deepen interfaith or intercultural relationships.

The servants did not create wine.

They carried water.

3. Grow Something Small

Commit to one Lenten practice:

- A weekly prayer for a specific region.
- A fast from despair-driven media consumption.
- A practice of noticing one “mustard seed” each day.

Prayers & Concerns / Announcements:



*We lift up prayers for all of God's
Creation. Lord Hear our Prayers.*

continued prayers for Healing and Wholeness				those in Community Living & Homecare
Rev. Alan Mark	Emi Hino	Kay Saxton	Patty Kobayashi	Chic Miyake
Alice Kajiya	Ernie Santiago	Kian Tehrani	Priscilla Kandel	Doris Kato
Alvena & Tom Fukuhara	Faith Tanaka	K&I Hashimoto	Raquel M. Martinez	Emma Moriuchi
Amy Higa	Florence Nakakura	Rev. Kim Montenegro	Rev. Mike Hiranuma	Faith Tanaka
Anthony Anderson, Sr.	Frank Sato	Kelsey DeGracia	Ron Hamaguchi	Rev. Harry Fujimoto
Apolosi Lokotui	Fred Oshiro	Kenny Medeiros	Rick Katsuki	Irene & Tak Ryono
Audrey Goto	Geri Shiraki	Kyle Ichikawa	Ruth Hirata	Jane Kiyohara
Austin Maeda	Glenn & Millie	Larry Takumi	Ruth Taira	Marion Antoku
Barbara Tamura	Shimizu	Layne Nakasone	Sandra Minjarez-Grange	Mary Jung
Betty Kobata	Grace Tochiara	Linda Jung	Ston Miyasato	Nobie Shiokari
Bill Morris	Grant Hanada	Liz Harner	Steph Matsunaga	Ruth Hirata
Brian Okumura	Harriet Tateyama	Lucas Yniguez	Sue Hamada	Sets Asano
Cami Bruns	Haru Yasunaga	Marisa Senzaki	Sue Hasegawa	Sue Hasegawa
Chic Miyake	Hisako Shohara	Marion Antoku	Susan DeGracia	
Christine Keim	Ingrid Peterson	Mae Nakakihara	Susan Mizuki	for our Worldwide Community
Claretta Foster	Irene Munesato	Mary Jung	Susan Slade	for the Leadership of our Country and our Churches
Dan Segawa	Jack Honda	Mary & Bob Keily (siblings)	Takai Finau	for the immigrants: migrants, refugees, asylees
Danny Takudomi	Jayne Watanabe	Mary Marchand	Theresa Apicella	for our siblings in Christ who struggle and in need of God's care
Dan Yamashita	Jehiel Vinluan	Mary Tamura	Tommy Sakaguchi	
Deron Tokishi	Jennie Shitakubo	Mary Tamura (Tsutsui)	Tseyli Mantoath	for those who live in through wars, unrest, and violence
Diane & Destiny Ueda-Banda	Jerry Osaka	Maxine Butcher	V'hraniku & Shaun Haynes	for those suffering and rebuilding after national disasters and man-made catastrophes
Dr. DoAnn Tsuneta Kaneko	Joanne Sato	Miyoko Ahn	Victoria DeLaTorre	
Douglas Higa	Joelle Peelgreen	Mutsuko Nishi	Walker Wilkerson	
Elaine Yashida	Jordan Sasaki	Nancy Matsushima	Wayne Shimizu	
Eleanor Nagai	Joye Banker	Noah Miyagawa-Sue	Whitney Nakayama	
	Juliet Koyanagi	Oscar Phillip Bland Jr.	Winnie Osaki	
	Kaitlyn Sabedra	Pam Fink	Yukio Inouye	
	Karlynn Fernandez			

for All Our Saints
Lynne, Gilbert, and Erica Vinluan and family on the passing of Lynne's mother, Corinne Higa, (2/14/26).
Stephanie & Darrel Inouye and family on the passing of Darrel's mother, Lorraine Inouye, (2/14/26).
Alice & Darrell Mark, on the passing of Nelson's sister, MalPina Chan (2/14/26).
Karen Matsuyama & Shitakubo families, on the passing of Fred Matsuyama (1/24/2026). **A Celebration of Life for Fred will be held on February 27 from 10am-1:30pm at South Bay Community Church.**
Keith Tokuhara and family on the passing of Keith's aunt, Helen Nozaki (1/6/26). **A Celebration of Life will be held on March 7, 2026, 2pm at Faith UMC.**

UPDATED 2.20.2026

Celebrations:

- Baby Adeline "Andie" Jane Yamamoto, proud parents, Jasmine and Matthew Yamamoto; great-granddaughter of Jane Kiyohara (1/2/26)
- Ryden Richard Wilkerson, proud grandparents, Teresa Sato and Rick Wilkerson (1/14/26)
- New Members! We welcome Risa Vargas and Stephanie Matsunaga! ● Retirement for Rev. Keith & Viki Inouye

Birthdays:

Maddie Sakurai-Lopez turned 3 (2/2/26)
Amara, Alice
Christine

For healing and recovery

- Pam Fink (recovery)
- Diane Ueda-Banda
- Victoria DelaTorre
- Alvena Fukuhara & Tom
- Mae Nakakihara
- Mary Tamura
- Jennie Shitakubo
 - Mitchell Okumura
- Frank Sato
- Mary & Bob Kiely (siblings of Ann Kiely)
- Audrey Goto recovery
- Alice Kajiya
- Larry Takumi
- Harriet Tateyama
- Tseyli Mantooth
- Kim Foster & Claretta Foster: V'rhaniku Haynes: high risk pregnancy, 5 months, baby girl
- Walker Wilkerson
- Kiki Hashimoto (Sue Kunisaki -friend)
- Rev's friends: Stan Miyasato, Darin Arntson, Mark & Trish Ulrickson, Mari'a Cleverly, (Norma, Ashley)
- Susan Slade's friend, Sherrie- finished tx
- Douglas Higa (Lynne Vinluan's dad)
- Jehiel Vinluan
- Dan Yamashita
- Apolosi Lokotui
- Susan Cordova (diagnosed with 3 types of cancer)
- Raquel Martinez (Julie's goddaughter)
- Mrs. Davis (friend of Kim Foster)
 - Rev. Alan Mark
 - The Shimizus
 - Winnie Osaki
 - Nancy Matsushima
 - Mary Tamura
 - Ruth Hirata
 - Faith Tanaka
 - Irene & Tak Ryono
 - Nobie Shiokari

...many who are homebound and those unable to be with us... and so many other that we all that we miss their presence next to us in the sanctuary and our groups.

Traveling Mercies

- Nargis Basu - Traveling to India for 3 months

World Concerns:

- All who struggle, suffer, experience pain and grief...
- US government and leadership (all of them); restoration of benefits, medical, food stamps, social security...
- War-torn countries, PALESTINE, UKRAINE, SYRIA, around the world...Natural disasters around the world...
- Immigrants, Refugees, Asylees losing rights and protections... ● Health Care system
- The homeless and impoverished
- Leadership (including clergy)
- All of God's children

Absent from the Body, Present with the Lord

- Lynne, Gilbert, and Erica Vinluan in the passing of Corinne (pronounced: Coreen) Higa (2/14)
- Stephanie & Darrell Inouye in the passing of Lorraine Inouye (2/14)
- Alice and Darrell Mark & Amanda Taketa-Mark on the passing of MalPina Chan (2/14)
- Closed (invitation only) service for Fred Matsuyama (family & friends)
- Nichigo service for Pastor Becky's Mom, Miyoko Ahn will be held in March at West LA.
- Mary Tamura, grandmother of Kevin Tsutsui (1/31)
- Helen Nozaki (aunt of Keith Tokuhara) - Celebration of Life, March 7, 2026, 2pm

- Richard Chan (Jason's Friend, 2/18)

And Know that He is God: Closing Prayer & Blessing

God of weddings and wilderness,
 God of exile and return,
 When the wine runs out,
 when memory aches,
 when empire feels enormous —
 teach us to carry water.

Plant in us the stubborn seed
 that refuses despair.

Make us servants of quiet miracles,
 witnesses to joy that will not be erased,
 and companions to all who live
 in the shadow of power.

Until water becomes wine,
 seeds become shelter,
 and your justice rises like dawn.
 Amen.

Further reading & research

Read "Commentary on John 2:1-11: Wine often marks major life moments," by Lindsey Scott. Working Preacher. January 20, 2019.

[workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-john-21-11-6](https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-john-21-11-6)

(Note: In this commentary, Lindsey Scott writes: "Rather than serving mediocre wine near the close of the wedding (when celebrants' senses were less keen), Jesus brings a surprising abundance of fine wine. We may draw parallels to God's work in the world. The beginning of Jesus' ministry marks the start of God's work in the world that has been long-awaited. The story leads us to expect surprisingly good and abundant things to come as Jesus begins his ministry. Starting the story with a provision of wine at a wedding feast, we can see Jesus' mission as continuing God's work in the world that provides hospitality and a space of belonging outside of the existing honor/shame structure.")

Read "The Unexpected Jesus: Week 2 // The Wedding in Cana," by Sarah Bessey. Sarah Bessey's FieldNotes. Published on Substack. September 17, 2024.

sarahbessey.substack.com/p/unexpected-jesus-3

(Note: In this reflection, author Sarah Bessey writes: "Jesus turns 180 gallons of water into the very best wine. I mean, I'm not a sommelier but that's a lot of good wine. Jesus doesn't just perform a miracle, he performs a sign and a wonder for what the world of the new wine looks like. This new reality looks like abundance and the manifestation of glory. You can't drink 180 gallons of wine alone. This over-abundance is a miracle of grace and abundance. When your sacred water turns into new wine, it's meant for a feast with many seats at the table.")

Watch “High Schoolers Share Good News in Their Lives.” TODAY. November 10, 2025.
[today.com/parents/teens/students-share-good-news-viral-video-rcna243046](https://www.today.com/parents/teens/students-share-good-news-viral-video-rcna243046)

(Note: Watch high schoolers in a small Ohio school district respond to the simple prompt, “Share something good that’s happened today.” After it was filmed and posted, this video quickly went viral due to the surprising joy within the students’ responses. You could replicate this exercise in your church throughout Lent as one of many joyful ways to ground your community in good news.)

*In her artist statement for *Messianic Secret*, Denise Anderson interprets the Wedding at Cana as an intentionally comedic story, and the dialogue between Jesus and his mother as playful banter between a mother and her son. She also highlights the secretive nature of the story; only a few know that the wine has run out, and only the servants (and perhaps Jesus’ mother and disciples) know that Jesus is the one who turns the water into wine. **How do you interpret the tone of this miracle story? As playful, sarcastic, comedic, serious, secretive, or something else?***



First Sunday in Lent

the good news is... so good it catches us by surprise



Messianic Secret

by T. Denise Anderson

Inspired by John 2:1-11

14"x18" Acrylic on canvas

The Wedding at Cana is my favorite text because there is a lot of humor in it. There's humor in a mother approaching her son and telling him to do something without ever actually telling him to do it. There's his pouty resistance to his mother's non-demand while she completely ignores him and paints him in a corner. There is humor in a raucous wedding reception where the people are so "lit" that the wine has run out. And, for me, it's particularly humorous that there's this huge, beautiful secret of which only a few people are aware.

Those people include Jesus' mother and the select servants who help him pull off the miracle that inaugurates his ministry. Servants are normally

meant to be inconspicuous, so I wanted to focus on the servant who goes to the chief steward⁵ with a cup full of what, as far as he's concerned, is water.

If Jesus—whose ministry has not started, so there haven't been any wonders associated with him yet—tells you to fill jars with water and draw from the jar to give to the chief steward, what is going through your mind at that moment? I invite the viewer to focus on this servant and all his curiosity and expectation, and think of a time when you were surprised by something God did. What actions preceded the miracle? Did it make sense? What did you know, and what was hidden from you? What "secrets" might God be keeping from you now as God works clandestinely on your behalf?

—Rev. T. Denise Anderson

Look

Imagine you are the servant in the image.

How do you feel as the chief steward tastes from the cup and realizes it is wine?

⁵ Depending on the translation of this text, the "chief steward" could alternatively be referred to as the "master of the feast," "headwaiter," or "person in charge of the banquet."



First Sunday in Lent

the good news is... so good it catches us by surprise



We Are Small, We Are Numerous, We Are Deep

by Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell

Inspired by Matthew 13:31-32

11"x14" Acrylic, mustard seed on paper

Loose mustard seeds are nearly impossible to contain. They drift and scatter with the slightest breeze, asserting their own unruly will much like the mustard plants themselves. The mustard plant, dismissed as invasive weeds by some, is cultivated for healing and nourishment by others. Even now, after completing this piece, I am still finding stray seeds in my laundry, my car, my hair.

"They tried to bury us; they didn't know we were seeds," a line attributed to Greek poet Dinos Christianopoulos,⁶ has become a rallying cry for separated families along the Mexican-American border. More than a century earlier, Toussaint Louverture—the formerly enslaved commander of the self-emancipated army of Black cultivators in

Saint-Domingue (colonial Haiti)—voiced a similar belief upon his deportation and imprisonment in France: "You have done no more than cut down the trunk of the tree of Black liberty. . . It will spring back from the roots, for they are numerous and deep."

From the Corn Mother of Indigenous myth to African women braiding okra seeds into their hair as they were forced from their homelands, many of our ancestors understood the power of carrying life in its smallest form. Seed-carrying is an act of faith. These tiny, unassuming specks hold the audacious hope that wherever we go, we already have what we need to take root and flourish in strange and foreign soils. May our faith and our hopes be just as audacious, resilient, and uncontainable as the seeds which hold the fruits of our faith. —Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell

Look

Pay attention to the textures in the artwork. Notice everywhere you see mustard seeds.

⁶ Dinos Christianopoulos (1931-2020) wrote the couplet in 1978 (published in his book, *The Body and the Wormwood*) as a defiant statement against the Greek literary establishment, which had ostracized him due to his homosexuality.

