

Witness of Ancient Wisdom, Nancy Nichols. John 2:1–11 (NRSVUE). On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet.” So they took it. When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. Witness of Modern Wisdom, “Start With a Wedding” by Rev. Sarah A. Speed, inspired by the Gospel of John’s celebratory beginning: When it comes time to write my obituary for the local paper, please do not start with my résumé. Do not begin with my career or my worldly accomplishments, however small they may be. Do not take up space writing about my alma mater or outlining the entire family tree; we know who we are. Instead, spend your precious little word count on how beautiful it all was. Write about the dinner parties and the fireside chats. Write about the evenings we spent on the front stoop counting fireflies. Write about summers in the mountains and the garden that we grew. Write about the seasons we cried out to God and the prayers that God answered. Write about the nights we danced and the days we laughed. When it comes time to tell the story of my life, please take a lesson from the Gospel of John and start with a wedding. Start with a miracle. Start with the fact that all of it held joy. God is still speaking, and we are still listening. Thanks be to God. Sermon, “So Good It Surprises,” Rev. Adam Hange: 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 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. If, like me, you like to watch the evening news before bed, you may have had this experience: halfway through, you think, “I can’t watch this anymore. It’s just war, division, violence, scarcity—another crisis, another headline, another argument.” And you wonder, is there any good news left? Sometimes it can feel like bad news is the only news, which makes this question all the more urgent: is the gospel still good news? This question is at the heart of our Lenten series, Tell Me Something Good. You may recognize that phrase from the lyrics of a 70s funk song; perhaps it is going through your head right now. But you may be wondering what this has to do with Lent. Lent is the forty-day season leading up to Easter, echoing the forty days Noah was in the ark, the forty days Moses fasted on Mount Sinai, and the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness fasting and praying while tempted by the devil. In the early centuries of Christianity, Lent was the time when new believers prepared for baptism, a season of learning, grounding, and returning to what mattered most—a time for asking questions: Who is Jesus? What did he actually do? What does it mean to follow him? What is this good

news Christians talk about? Over time, Lent became associated with fasting, repentance, and self-examination, practices that can help us clear space and deepen our spiritual lives. But at its heart, Lent is about returning to the root. The word “radical” comes from the Latin *radicalis*, meaning root. Lent’s aim is not to fill us with doom and gloom but to bring us back to the root of our faith. And this year our root question is simple: is the gospel still good news, and if so, what makes it good? Today’s theme is this: the good news is so good it surprises. John’s Gospel does not begin with shepherds or angels but with light shining in darkness and the Word becoming flesh, and then almost immediately Jesus goes to a wedding. Not a temple or a battlefield or a political rally, but a wedding. In Jesus’ time weddings lasted up to seven days, entire communities gathered, joy stretched out over time. Around day three there is a problem: they have run out of wine. In that culture hospitality was sacred, and running out of wine would bring deep social shame. Mary tells Jesus, “They have no wine.” He replies, “My hour has not yet come,” yet she turns to the servants and says, “Do whatever he tells you.” Nearby are six large stone jars used for ritual purification. Jesus tells the servants to fill them with water, then draw some out and take it to the steward. When the steward tastes it, the water has become wine—the best wine—and not a few bottles but an extravagant abundance. Jesus’ first public sign is not a sermon or a healing but the saving of a party, the prevention of shame, the preservation of joy. Throughout scripture wine symbolizes blessing and abundance. At Cana the long-hoped-for future breaks into the present: the good news is not scarcity but abundance, not humiliation but restoration. Christianity is often misunderstood, reduced to exclusion or judgment, yet Lent invites us to meet Jesus again. When we meet him at Cana, we see not a moral enforcer but a bringer of joy, not someone obsessed with shame but someone who prevents it. The good news rooted in Jesus’ life and ministry is expansive and liberating. Like a mustard seed, it begins small and grows. A small act of mercy becomes a movement. A small word of affirmation changes a week. A small congregation offering space for recovery becomes a sanctuary of transformation. When we give our attention to good news, we begin to see more of it; joy multiplies and hope spreads. If the good news is really this good—joy that prevents shame, abundance that replaces scarcity—then it is meant to be shared. Evangelism simply means good news: let me tell you something good. It is not about coercion but about delight meeting the world’s deep need, about being fully yourself and sharing the peace of God. There are people quietly asking whether Christianity has anything good to say to them. What if the answer is yes? What if it is so good it surprises? As we journey through Lent toward the cross, acknowledging suffering and violence, let us not forget the wedding and the joy that marked the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. The first sign was abundance, the first miracle joy, the first revelation celebration. This Lent, let us notice joy, cultivate mercy, share abundance, and let the good news surprise someone. Amen.