Reflection for Atsumi and Justin

Here we are at a wedding. A time when we make vows that last. A promise that will be unchanging. A lasting commitment. Here, there will be a vow to stay together in richer and poorer, in sickness and health.

And into this time of promises into the future. I want to notice all that will change. This holy promise will be like a steady backbone to a life and a love that will change and change and change again. I pray that you do change. Grow, learn, evolve. Yes, Atsumi and Justin, I pray that you change. And, everyone here. I pray for the changes of a flourishing life for all of us.

And to help explain and understand change, we turn to scripture. Atsumi and Justin selected today's readings. These are pieces of scripture that they take with them into the future. Here is what I would call to their attention while they make enduring vows for a life of constant change.

The Gospel passage tells a story about a wedding. Jesus is with his mom at a wedding. When we read about Jesus, we tend to imagine every scene through thousands of years of the church, drawing Jesus as mature and fully formed. We tend to think of him as already equipped with a halo and the church's authority behind him.

But this was a beginning. Imagine Jesus as a young man. Just old enough to have the first few disciples. But not so old that when his mother called him and told him that Aunty's second cousin was getting married and he needed to come, Jesus shows up.

If you were going to tell the story about God, would you start here? Remember, we are reading from John's Gospel. John's Gospel actually begins with the epic lines – In the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (Jn 1:1). Then John the Baptist preaches in the wilderness: he calls on all to repent (to re-turn to God). And Jesus names his first disciples. That's John, chapter one. Our reading starts in chapter two, three days later. Here's a young Jesus with his first disciples, who have been following him for three days. At a wedding with his mother.

What do we learn here? What lessons are there here, at the wedding we celebrate today.

I invite us to notice how much faith the family and community have in this story. Later, Jesus initiates the signs and wonders, but here, it is his mother that pushes him into it. She brings Jesus the problem, she tells the servants what to do, she believes in this beginning. And her faith is rewarded. Yes, with yummy wine. Her faith is also rewarded with this the first sign of God's glory, and the disciples believed.

Which is kind of funny, isn't it? The disciples followed first, and in following, came to believe.

I suspect that marriage can be like that sometimes.

You agree to marry. You follow one another in life, careers, family, aging, and faith. An in following one another, you come to believe in one another more fully. Your love changes as you experience together a lifetime of signs of affection, respect, and trust.

But that makes it all sound so easy. And, very truly, I tell you marriage isn't always easy. Some of the changes here are difficult.

So I bring to our attention another element of a story that changes water into wine. Today, we read a passage that shows the prominent role of a community that believes in you. In this passage, at the beginning of Jesus's ministry, Jesus is surrounded by family, disciples, and the wedding community. At the *start* of his story, Jesus is held in a network of communities that abide in him. So, today we invite this community to be a safety net and support work around Justin and Atsumi.

Soon, we will begin the marriage ceremony. This is a series of vows, blessings, and prayers that formalize this union. And at the core of this whole service is a belief that we need to do this work together. It is not enough for Astumi and Justin to agree to marriage. Their vows must be witnessed by the community. And, here today, each of us will also make a holy vow. (Holy by the faith of your own heart and tradition) Each of us will make a holy vow to support and to believe in this couple. This is not a theoretical promise. This is a vow before the Divine to support Justin and Astumi in their union when the marriage is easy and when changes are difficult. Support Astumi and Justin by bringing them water and support this couple by inviting them to be their best selves. Support Justin and Astumi by drinking their wine, and by being an example to them. Showing them your own life changes honestly, and in vulnerable truth walk with them through their life changes and yours.

And so I pray

Let this marriage be an unchanging backbone in a lifetime of change. Let the community here and across the world support Justin and Atsumi in the many changes of their lives together. Let this community be there for them in the difficult times of weary, dreary water and the abundant times of weddings and wine.

Also is it possible to translate this prayer for Season of Creation (on a separate page please)

*Gathering Prayer:*

Creator, **we give you thanks for all you are and all you bring to us for our visit within your creation. In Jesus, you place the Gospel in the Centre of this Sacred Circle through all of which all creation is related. You show us the way to live a generous and compassionate life. Give us your strength to live together with respect and commitment as we grow in your spirit, for you are God, now and forever.**

*People* **Amen.**