

Sermon – January 20, 2019

John 2 - Jesus Changes Water to Wine

1On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there,
2and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3When the wine
was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

4"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet
come."

5His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

6Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial
washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.^[a]

7Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

8Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, 9and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned
into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had
drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside 10and said, "Everyone
brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had
too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

11This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus
revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

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This morning I am going to talk about our Lord as an agent of transformation at the wedding in Cana.

But first, recently,

A small boy was asked by his grandparent, "What are you learning in Sunday School?"

"Last week," came the reply, "our lesson was about when Jesus went to a wedding and made water into wine."

"And what did you learn from that story?" the grandparent inquired.

After thinking for a moment, the lad answered, "If you're having a wedding, make sure Jesus is there!"

You know, that little boy was right on the mark. It is a good thing to invite Christ to be at our wedding ceremonies, indeed it is good to invite Jesus into each day of our lives.

Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding. He had been invited with his disciples. His mother was there too. After a while...they ran out of wine. It's not surprising they ran out of wine. Apparently weddings lasted 7 days. Running out of wine would have been an embarrassment to the host. In those times it would have brought great shame on him. He and his family would have been excluded from future social gatherings for such a blunder. Then Jesus intervenes. He gets the servants to fill with water, the stone water jars used for ritual washing. Then, somehow the water in the jars is transformed into wine.

This was Jesus' first miracle in the Gospel of John. This miracle does not appear in any of the other Gospels. It's a different miracle, unlike any of his others. He healed many, he cast out demons, and he brought the dead back to life. But this miracle is one of **transformation**; transformation of water into wine.

You may wonder why Jesus', first miracle, was turning water into wine? In the Gospel of John, Jesus often says and does things that have double meanings. There is more to it than the surface story of providing wine at the wedding. Jesus doesn't explain. So we are left to wonder what was the deeper meaning of that transformation of water into wine.

The stone jars were used for ceremonial cleansing. The Jewish people had purification rituals...to make themselves clean and pure before God. It is significant that Jesus chose the jars used for purification. The transformation is an offering of something different from purification rituals. He changes the water used to wash on the outside of the body into wine which works on the inside of the body. It suggests that Jesus will do more than make us outwardly pure; he will change us inwardly; he will change our hearts. Jesus provides wine for the party, a life giving substance of celebration and joy.

The jars were very large, holding 120-180 gallons. They held enough wine for the entire wedding party as well! There was more than enough for everyone. It is very best quality wine. This reveals God's gracious desire to provide everyone with the best and with abundance.

We are still in the season of Epiphany a season of God's showing who God is. This event at the wedding in Cana is an epiphany, a revelation of the nature of God through Jesus. Witnessing this sign, the water changing to wine, fine wine, abundant wine, reveals to us and the disciples a glimpse into Jesus' identity. Seeing his power to transform, the disciples believed. They probably didn't understand fully what had happened, but they knew they had witnessed something amazing and it made them trust Jesus. That is the whole point of the sign, the whole point of the Gospel of John, is so that they and we might trust Jesus.

Jesus is still performing signs and wonders in our world today so that we might see his power to transform and believe in him. It takes practice for us to pick up the signs. Maybe it takes special eyes. Maybe it takes a special heart to tune into the signs.

St. Augustine, about this morning's Gospel writes:

"He who made the wine that day at the marriage feast does this every year in vines. But we do not wonder at the latter because it happens every year; it has lost its marvel by its constant occurrence."

Our Lord transforms in nature and in us, but we may not notice it. WE need to be sensitive to the transformation happening all around us. Transformation is what our Lord is doing with us and with our community and our world. God is 'the transformer', a God passionate to change us and the world, surprising us, mystifying us, but drawing us to become whole.

What could be more extraordinary than a group of people from different backgrounds, different places, different economic circumstances, different educations, coming together to be a new community, called the church? Is that not transformation? Our epistle this morning tells us the Spirit gifts each of us. The

community, with its over abundant gifting is the grace. Each has a gift for the common good. Look around: you are the miracle of water becoming wine.

Today, many in US churches honor the extraordinary life of Martin Luther King Jr., whose birth is celebrated, on the third Mon in January. In honor of MLK, hundreds of volunteers across the US donate their time to make a difference on this day. King was, in his own words, the "drum major" for the marching band that sought to break down the barrier of segregation laws, of restrooms and lunch counters that read "white only" or "colored only,"; of separate but supposedly equal educational systems. He had a dream of a transformed nation that was color-blind, tolerant, and accepting of everyone as God's children, regardless of class or race.

It seems we are called not only to be coloured blind but to have a vision even when we can't really see it.

Eric Weihenmayer was the first blind climber to climb Mount Everest on May 25, 2001.

In September 2014, with fellow blind kayaker, Lonnie Bedwell, Weihenmayer kayaked the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon, 277 miles.

Today, while still adventuring, he is a prominent worldwide speaker, on using adversity to advantage and living a "No Barriers Life", helping people to see their world in a new light.

Imagine!... a blind person helping sighted people to see. Is he not an agent of transformation?

In an interview, Weihenmayer talked about the kind of people with whom he likes to work. He said:

"I look for people who have an unrealistic optimism about life.
I hear people say, 'Seeing is believing.'
I want people who believe the opposite,
'Believing is seeing.'
You've got to believe first in what you're doing
and be sure you have a reason to believe it.
You can tell who those people are.
You say, 'Hey, want to climb Everest with a blind guy?'
Pretty quickly you'll figure out who's a believer."

When we latch onto the Lord's power to transform, when we believe and put our trust in the Lord, we are like the bird that sings in the dark..., while still in darkness, it feels dawn will be breaking, so it sings before the light comes.

If we do a review at the end of each day, we begin to notice the transformations small and large in our lives. We begin to recognize present miracles, which we have missed or taken for granted. It prepares us to receive still more miracles.

Walt Whitman, the poet, felt that "each part..." of his own person was a miracle. He reminded us that we are surrounded by the glorious and the miraculous and do not know it.

We need to know that God is at work in our world. The affairs of this world, and of our communities and individual lives, often seem to be out of control or dismal. We are especially aware of the chaos. Then there is the plight of The Syrian refugees. Still, we can be reassured by the knowledge that God has worked wonderfully in days past, and that he is still at work and that God's purposes for us are good.

We know in living, mixed in with the joy are sorrow and pain. We can be happy one minute and annoyed or hurt soon after. Why is it that it's the things which are wrong, the things which are painful, that grab our attention. But looking back over every day, every one of us will find at least one second when we experienced something good...and that is God's sign of transformation in our lives. We need to grab onto it.

Let's rejoice that God wants to change us. God wants to give us fine wine in abundance and God wants us to celebrate. Let us rejoice that we can be transformed this morning in the bread and the wine. Let us look for the small and the large transformations going on right now. Why not have an 'unrealistic optimism about life'? Let us believe in the good purposes of God at work right here and be like that little bird who sings with all its heart even in the darkness, confident that the dawn will be breaking very soon. Amen!

The novelist Catherine Cookson was born in England in 1906. Because she was illegitimate, she had a miserable childhood, rejected by both children and adults. She lived in poverty in a tiny terraced house with no modern conveniences, where her mother struggled against prejudice to provide the basic necessities of life.

In her lonely misery, young Catherine used to gaze longingly at the big manor houses inhabited by the wealthy. She vowed that when she grew up, she too would live in a house like that and enjoy a comfortable lifestyle.

It was a long time before that happened, for Catherine. With very little formal education, she didn't begin to write until her 40s, publishing her first novel in 1950. Most of her novels are set in the NE of England, where she grew up. God's power used even the painful childhood memories to very good effect, transforming her into one of the country's leading best-seller writers.

Prayer over the Gifts

Living God, you have revealed your Son as the Messiah.

May we hear his word and follow it,

and live as children of light.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

Prayer after Communion

God of glory, you nourish us with bread from heaven

Fill us with your Holy Spirit,

That through us your light may shine in all the world.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.