

“The Taste of New Wine”

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John 2:1-11

Just a few weeks ago we were celebrating the *incarnation*....God becoming human through Jesus Christ....Emmanuel....God with us, born to Mary in a lowly manger in Bethlehem. Shortly thereafter we were riding with the Magi, following the star and celebrating that the light had been revealed, not just to Jews, but to the whole world through Jesus Christ. Last week we watched Jesus come out of the baptismal waters and we heard God declare, ***“You are my beloved with whom I am well pleased.”*** Today we are invited, along with Jesus and his disciples, to a wedding where we will witness the beginning of Jesus’ ministry according to the Gospel of John. At this wedding Jesus first revealed his glory with a sign that forged faith in his disciples. We’ve all been invited to the wedding, so let’s go....

John 2:1-11

“On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. ⁹When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰and 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.”

¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.” *The Word of the Lord....*

“Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.” Well, there you have it. Jesus’ first sign of his earthly ministry and his disciples believed in him! John doesn’t use the word *miracle* but, instead, he prefers the word *sign*.

I like John's choice of the word sign. We can easily get hung up on "miracles" and focus too much attention on them. But a "sign" directs our attention elsewhere.....beyond the sign. Last week we spoke of the sacraments as being "*visible signs of an invisible reality.*" What is important is the reality toward which the sign points!

So, here we are at a wedding, and Jesus chooses to give a sign "to reveal his glory." *What did he do? Heal a leper? No! Preach a spell-binding sermon? No! Raise someone from the dead? No!* He transformed water into the best wine anyone had ever tasted!

Depending on your taste for fine wine and party going this first sign of Jesus' glory is either quite encouraging or rather incongruous. *Why did Jesus choose to reveal his glory in this way? To what does this sign point?*

Some might wonder why Jesus would be at a wedding in the first place. Some might pigeonhole Jesus thinking that he would be too busy praying, witnessing, or helping the poor to mingle with ordinary folk at a social event. That Jesus might not even be interested in going to a party. I spoke to this issue in my sermon, "*A Wedding in Historic Milford,*" last September. Here's what I said:

"I am concerned that we only picture Jesus in the temple or synagogue or teaching by the Sea of Galilee. Yes, he was at home in those settings but he was also at home at parties, out fishing, in the homes of rich and poor, camping out under the stars and at weddings. Question: can you picture Jesus doing the Electric Slide or the Macarena or the Twist or the Hokie Pokie at a wedding reception? Don't make Jesus out to be "holier than thou." Don't lock him in the church! He became human to experience life as we live it and to reveal life as God desires us to live. I can easily picture Jesus doing the Electric Slide, after all he was invited to the wedding and he was fully human." (September 27, 2009)

Yes, Jesus came to our world to teach and redeem but he also came to enjoy and connect with people right where we live. It seems natural to me that the One who took such delight in creating the world and all of its people, would also delight in being with them on a day of celebration. Jesus, whose whole life reflected God's grace and love would certainly want to share the wonder of a young couple's love at their wedding! I hope you can picture Jesus *with you* in all the venues of your life.....restaurants, schools, work place, Paul Brown stadium, your home, on the bike trail, in your car.....*wherever* you are, Jesus is there taking delight in you!

Jesus is not only celebrating the joys of your life but he is also looking deep into your heart for those areas that need to be restored by the new wine he brings. We know that weddings are not always joyous occasions for all guests. If we were to see the wedding party through the eyes of Jesus, we would know that one of the bridesmaids who is smiling for the camera is hurting on the inside for she knows that her husband is about to file for divorce. If we had the eyes of Jesus we would know that the father of the groom, who is nonchalantly buying drinks for everyone, is sinking in debt and doesn't see a way out. If we had the eyes of Jesus we would know that there is a huge rift between members of the bride's family. If we had eyes of Jesus we would understand that some of the guests aren't there to celebrate the covenant of marriage but are looking for one night stands. If we had eyes of Jesus we would see that some of the guests are masking regrets, loneliness and pain.

I am glad Jesus chose to show his solidarity with us by attending the wedding and I am glad that the first sign of his glory took place in the midst of this "real life" venue with all the joy, happiness and baggage that is always present at weddings. What a powerful sign.....water into wine! Taking common water and transforming it into an abundance of wine that all exclaimed was the best they had ever tasted. It was an incredible gesture of generosity! There's the sign! Jesus said of himself, "***I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly.***" (John 10:10) Another way of saying it is that Jesus came to give us the taste of new wine. This is not the taste of money, houses, cars, and travel which is often what we think of when we mention the abundant life. But Jesus' taste of new wine is more about how we live than what we have. Jesus' new wine is a life-giving relationship with God who frees us to live life with purpose, grace, mercy, and love.

This past week a catastrophic earthquake devastated the poverty stricken country of Haiti. *What does Jesus' first sign of turning water into wine have to do with such a colossal tragedy?* We have heard reports of both the destruction and the determination to survive. But, in the midst of the horror, a nationally known Christian leader, *Pat Robertson*, intimated that God is judging Haiti because they supposedly made a "pact to the devil" long ago.

Where do you see God in the Haiti earthquake? As the One judging the people of Haiti through a horrendous earthquake because of a pact to the devil *or* as the One coming to the people of Haiti through the prayers, aid, and support that is pouring in from all parts of the world? How you answer that question says a lot about your understanding of God.

I believe Jesus' first sign makes it clear who God is and what God intends for our world. Jesus turned water into wine....he came to bring life. Most of us have memorized, at one time or another, John 3:16....this is truly a water into wine passage:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." But have you gone ahead and read John 3:17? ***"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*** Sounds like water into wine to me!

Comments like Pat Robertson suggest that God is punishing the Haitian people with a deadly earthquake. But the God I know....the God revealed through Jesus Christ does not establish His Kingdom through earthquakes but by changing water into wine. On Facebook, I have found a group I plan to join. The group's name is: *"Pat Robertson does NOT speak for me as a Christian."*

I don't look for God in the earthquake but I do see God in men like Dr. Claude Surena, a 59 year old Haitian pediatrician who has treated the sick at his two-story hillside home near the center of Port-au-Prince for many years. Fortunately, his home was not destroyed by the quake. As you can imagine, Dr. Surena's home became a triage center, currently housing more than 100 victims. Dr. Surena stated, ***"It was a blessing from God my house is safe,"*** he said. ***"We at least have been able to do something."***

The article describes how Dr. Surena and others are doing everything they can with very few supplies to bring medical care and relief to those who find their way to his house. I also found it interesting that it was reported, “*The injured sing Christian hymns as they huddle close together beneath sheets strung up as tents.*”

--“**Haitian doctor takes 100 patients into his home**”

www.msnbc.msn.com (January 16, 2010)

Dr. Surena is a beacon of hope in the midst of the devastation giving the help he can and providing a haven for the injured. That’s where I see God at work in Haiti. I see water being changed into wine through people like Dr. Surena.

We can also be a part of the taste of new wine by praying for the people of Haiti, the relief work and the rebuilding effort. You will also find in your bulletin, opposite the calendar page, information on how you can contribute financially to the relief effort. Our Session will be giving further guidance about how our church can be a part of bringing life....the taste of new wine....to the people of Haiti.

I love the quote from Martin Luther King, Jr. on the front of your bulletin

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” --Strength to Love, 1963

Martin Luther King, Jr. was a great Christian leader who sought to bring the taste of new wine to a segment of our society that was relegated to second class citizenship and also to our whole country that we might see the heart of Jesus. I’m glad our country chose, in 1986, to celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. with a day to remember that he understood Jesus’ first sign.

Most importantly, I’m glad Jesus chose to come to the wedding and that he turned water into wine. That was his first sign and that sign is the gospel....the taste of new wine!

Amen

