

"CHANGING WATER INTO WINE"

INTRODUCTION

This morning I would like to turn to the life of Jesus and spend some time considering with you with the first miracle He performed with the intent of letting some of the meaning of this miracle spill over into our lives. It was read to you earlier in the service. In some quarters, it is suggested that to enjoy one's self in our kind of world is to betray those causes that need our unbroken allegiance and support. In the throes of this tension - wanting to enjoy, but fearing to - I turn to the account of Jesus' experience at the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee.

Had Jesus done nothing more than simply grace that happy occasion with His presence we would still have cause for thanks. For the incident tells us a few things about Him.

TO BEGIN WITH

To begin with, it's obvious from this account that Jesus was very much at home with "little" people. He felt comfortable with them, and they with Him. I think we need to be careful not to idealize this wedding that He attended. This was no society page affair. The list of guests did not read like an extract from "Who's Who." This was a simple, country wedding. The nameless bride and groom were of the common people of the land.

We make a mistake to think of Him as the exclusive property of the theologians, or the well-to-do, or the powerful. Perhaps no tribute paid Him meant more than that line from the Gospel, "The common people heard Him gladly".

It may be that Jesus felt that the common people of the earth were the bearers of our world's wisdom and hope in a way that their more celebrated leaders were not. I seldom find myself agreeing with William F. Buckley, Jr., but something within me said "Amen" to a point he made some time back in his column...that he would far rather trust his governance - in which he would include the preservation of his civil rights and his intellectual freedom - to the first hundred persons listed in the Cambridge telephone directory than to the faculty of Harvard College. Those unpretentious citizens who gathered for the festivities at Cana were the beneficiaries of His word and His presence.

ANOTHER THING

Another thing suggested by this incident from John's Gospel is that Jesus apparently felt that weddings are important! Most of the marriage ceremonies in the Christian world directly or indirectly make reference to the fact that Jesus attended the wedding at Cana of Galilee. And it would be impossible to exaggerate the significance of His presence on that occasion for the young couple - wine crisis or no wine crisis.

Guests do help to make a wedding. A marriage is always enhanced by social reinforcement. To me it's sad to see a couple go down to City Hall by themselves to be married there by a Judge or a Justice of the Peace - not that I have anything against Judges or Justices of the Peace. The sadness comes from the absence of social reinforcement, of friends. For friends provide a context in which the sacral character of life is expressed and strengthened.

Jesus went to a wedding. It was important, He felt, to be there.

I remember a custodian we had here at the church some time back who was grumbling because he had some work to do in getting the church ready for a

wedding. There were pews to polish, floors to mop, window ledges to be dusted, flowers to be placed on the altar. He remarked something like this, "So much fuss for a ten minute service". To which, I replied something like this, "You know it isn't really for a ten minute service...is it? Hopefully, it's for a lifetime" and with this word, he cheered up enough to finish the cleaning.

I should like to think that our association with other people in the milestone occasions of their lives is a ministry in itself. It's a pity that we so often take what one might call the "hallmark way out"...that is, sending a card or note instead of being present. And how sad that so many of the "Letters to Abby" and her counterparts have to do with how little one need do to save face when a wedding invitation is received. Our gifts are nothing compared to the lift our presence can bring. Just by being with our friends on their wedding day enriches their life together for all time.

Jesus went to a wedding. Let us never forget that, and if we read carefully between the lines, He had Himself a time.

ANOTHER THOUGHT Another thought to turn over in your mind is that Jesus went to Cana even though He was committed to a mighty cause. There's no reason for us to doubt that He considered His time spent there well spent! He wasn't there as the Officiating Rabbi. He was there as a friend of the family. Or, He may have been there through the intercession of Nathaniel who came from Cana.

It's always a joy to meet people who have a cause without being boring about it - people who have a burning vision in their hearts - who do not set out to dominate the life of every soul around them. Mark you, Jesus was just back from the struggle in the wilderness. Mark you, He was at a very important point in His life - choosing men, mapping out a strategy. Mark you, He probably had the feeling that His time was tight, limited, His days numbered. And yet, there He was at the wedding, relaxing, enjoying Himself.

As one reads the Gospels, he is impressed by the fact that Jesus' life was laced with intervals of pleasant social intercourse. This may not say anything to you, but it speaks to me because I find myself occasionally confronted with one-cause zealots who insist on administering their loyalty tests. All of the causes are good, needful of our support, and certainly one would like to be counted in the proper columns and be supportive of all gatherings conducted by the causes - but sometimes this is difficult and sometimes it can conflict with an evening spent with friends or family, relaxing in pleasant fellowship.

It was Mozart who said of himself, "My rests are more important than my notes". I was having lunch earlier this year with a colleague who like so many clergymen keep a fairly heavy and tightly scheduled week. He said something that spoke to me:

"You know it is so important that we have a sense of leisure. A sense of leisure can be even more important than leisure itself".

Jesus began His public ministry by going to a wedding feast. He ended it by sitting down for supper with friends in an Upper Room. In between, He found time to eat with Zacchaeus and others, time for visits to the home of Mary and

Martha, time also for a big picnic with a multitude on a mountain side. Had He done nothing more than grace this wedding in Cana with His presence, we would have had cause for thanks. But He did more!

HE RESCUED IT He not only graced that occasion. He rescued it. A crisis developed when the wine ran out. It's entirely possible that Jesus and His disciples were partly to blame for the crisis. The supply was depleted when the disciples and Jesus arrived on the scene. I don't want to make too much of this. However, He was alerted to the need by His mother. You know the story. He commanded that six stone jars be filled to the top. He asked the servants to draw. And when they did, it was wine and not water that they drew out. And the wine was of such quality that a veteran steward who had been to many a party was moved to remark, "Why, you have kept the good wine until now!"

I have no trouble believing in the miraculous here. In fact, I find it quite like Jesus. He wouldn't turn the stones into bread for Himself, but He did turn water into wine for other people. My faith does not rest on this miracle, but it extends to this miracle. Why should one doubt it? Each Spring in the vineyards of the world, God draws up water from the ground and transforms it into pungent juices of the grape. May we should leave it to the poet who said: "The modest water saw its God and blushed".

The disciples were not inclined to exploit the wonders of Christ's deeds. In fact, the whole account suggests an intention to play down the spectacular. John tells us in his Epilogue that the disciples saw in what Jesus did a sign in which His glory, His uniqueness was manifested.

AS A SIGN IT POINTS As a sign, it pointed beyond itself to something else. Symbolically, it was suggesting that Jesus' ministry was to be a ministry of replacement.

Those six jars represented the Old Testament ceremonial religion. Pans and utensils were washed by religious prescription with water from those jars. Henceforth, those jars are to be filled no longer with water, but with the new wine of the Gospel. "He came not to destroy, but to fulfill". "You have heard it said, but I say unto you". "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead, but the bread that I shall give you". "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him".

The sign was not only pointing to this ministry of replacement, but also to the truth that Jesus had come into the world to restore the quality of our life...to change the water into the wine of life.

Our theologians of gloom have sometimes misled us or we have misheard them. When a voice in the Calvinist tradition speaks about the inherent evil in man, he mis-states the case. Let John Baillie of Edinburgh correct us:

"The doctrine of man made in the image of God has its basis in the fact that our existent human nature presents itself to us, not as a simply bad thing, but as a good thing spoiled."

Before original sin, there was original goodness. Men and women are not essentially

bad. Something good in us all has been spoiled. Jesus' ministry is to restore the luster of that which has lost its shine. He did not come to stop the music, or to silence the poetry, or to dam up the juices of life. He came that we might have life, and that we might have it abundantly. "Born'again" into that life!

OUR TASK Our tasks then, if He has turned our water into wine, is to raise the quality of life around us - not only in the physical environemtn, but also in the more important spheres of relationships and inner dispositions. To keep alive before the world the option of a better way - this is our task as Christians.

There are people in our world who lower, who spoil, who degrade, who degrade everything they touch, who pull down. Every home they visit, every shope they enter, every office in which they work, every profession in which they serve - tends to be the poorer for their presence. There are forces at work all around us that would turn the wine of life into water - that would reduce a home to a house, a vocation to a job, education to job-training, knowledge to information, souls to number, sexuality to lust, poetry to prose, faith to church membership.

But our mission as those who have felt the life-giving touch and power of the Man of Galilee is to raise the quality of life that men might discover again what they once had and lost. I like what one of the bigraphers said of the late Justice Felix Frankfurter:

"What he gave his time was an enlargement of its human life. As long as he was there in his office in this building or his house on Dumbarton Avenue, or off at Heath in the massachusetts hills in the Summers, the world had an extra dimension for us all".

There is an old story about a priest in a small European town who was about to leave for another assignment. The people of the parish decided that as a farwell gift they would present him with a cask of wine. Each family in the parish was to bring some wine from its own vineyard. When all was ready the priest was taken to the cask and told to draw himself a glass. As he did so nothing came out but pure water. Each man had said to himself:

"What difference will it make? My contribution is of no great importance. The wuality of my wine is so weak that it would spoil the quality of the rest. If I just put in some water, what I do will not be noticed."

CLOSING This then is the meaning of the first miracle of Jesus worked at Cana of Galilee. His mission was a mission of replacement and of restoration. And once He has touched our lives and transformed the water of our life to wine, He then commissions us to raise the quality of life around us. There are multitudes outside, and perhaps some inside - who need to be assured that life is not an ordeal to be endured, but rather more like a wedding feast - to be enjoyed, celebrated. Changing water into wine. It happened then. ~~It happens now as people taste of the fruit of the cross~~ It can happen now... here, today...and you and I are called by Jesus to help it happen.

PRAYER Fill us, O God, with thy true spirit. May the symbolic meaning of this miracle spill over into our lives. Mark us as thine own, and grant to us the willingness to change life's water into wine for those around us in the days of this new week. In the spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen

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INTRODUCTION

Last Sunday we reviewed together the first temptation experience of Jesus. We drew some lessons from that wilderness experience of His, lessons that hopefully will be helpful to us as we encounter temptation in our own lives. Today, on this the Second Sunday in Lent, we turn again to the life of Jesus and consider the first miracle He performed with the intent of letting some of the meaning of this miracle spill over into our lives.

~~Remember the book by Harry Golden entitled, Enjoy, Enjoy. Unfortunately, too many are simply enduring life rather than enjoying it. In some quarters, it is even suggested that to enjoy one's self in our kind of world is to betray those causes that need our unbroken allegiance and support. In the throes of this tension - wanting to enjoy, but fearing to - I turn to the account of Jesus' experience at the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee. ~~What does it say to us.~~~~

WHAT IT TELLS US ABOUT HIM

Had Jesus done nothing more than simply grace that happy occasion with His presence we would still have cause for thanks. For the incident tells us a few things about Him.

I. To begin with, it's obvious from this account that Jesus was very much at home with "little" people. He felt comfortable with them, and they with Him. I think we need to be careful not to idealize the wedding that he attended. This was no society page affair, mind you. The list of guests did not read like an extract from Who's Who. This was a simple, country wedding. The nameless bride and groom were of the common people of the land.

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It may be that Jesus felt that the common people of the earth were the bearers of our world's wisdom and hope in a way that their more celebrated leaders were not. I seldom find myself agreeing with William F. Buckley, Jr, but something within me said "yes" to a point he was recently making - that he would far rather trust his governance - in which he would include the preservation of his civil rights and his intellectual freedom - to the first hundred persons listed in the Cambridge telephone directory than to the faculty of Harvard College. Those unpretentious citizens who gathered for the festivities at Cana were the beneficiaries of His word and presence.

II. Another thing suggested by this incident is that Jesus apparently felt that weddings are important. Most of the marriages ceremonies in the Christian world directly or indirectly make reference to the fact that Jesus attended the wedding at Cana of Galilee. And it would be impossible to exaggerate the significance of His presence on that occasion for the young couple - wine crisis or no wine crisis!

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III. Another thought to turn over in your mind is that Jesus went to Cana even though He was committed to a mighty cause. There's no reason for us to doubt that He considered His time spent there well spent! He wasn't there as the officiating rabbi; he was there either as a friend of the family or through the intercession of Nathaniel who came from Cana.

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It was Mozart who said of himself, "My rests are more important than my notes". I was having lunch several weeks ago with a fellow minister who like so many clerics keeps a fairly heavy and tightly scheduled seven day week. He said something that spoke to me:

Good! "You know it is so important that we have a sense of leisure.
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itself".

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What difference will it make?

"My contribution is of no great importance. The quality of my wine is so weak that it would spoil the quality of the rest. If I just put in some water, what I do will not be noticed".

CLOSING SUMMARY

This then is the meaning of the first miracle that Jesus worked at Cana of Galilee. His mission was a mission of replacement and of restoration. And once He has touched our lives and transformed the water of our life to wine - He commissions us to raise the quality of life around us. There are multitudes outside, and some perhaps inside - who need to be assured that life is not an ordeal to be endured, but rather more like a wedding feast to be enjoyed, to be celebrated. Changing water into wine - it happened then...it can

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PRAYER

Fill us, O God, with thy true spirit. May others through us come to know that the old has passed away and the new has come. May the meaning of this miracle in which Jesus changed the water into wine - may its symbolic meaning spill over into our lives. Mark us as thine own, and grant to each of us the willingness to change life's water into wine for those around us in the days of this new week into which we now enter. In the name and spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen