

January 20, 2019

New Wine Changing Our Lives

Prayer

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts and all that we say and do, be only acceptable to you. O Lord our God. Amen.

Sermon

Do any of you look at the cartoons in the paper? Good. You know cartoons really become commentaries of life. I remember one a long time ago that I used to see, I don't think it's in there anymore. There's a person walking along and there's this dark cloud over their heads. You ever seen that one? That says something about your age too.

(Laughter)

Recently someone reminded me of that old cartoon when they said, "You see that woman walking in the door there, she is followed by a black cloud." Meaning that she seems perpetually disturbed and frightened with a constant relentless messenger of bad news. A victim of unlucky breaks one after the other. Of course, everyone of us, all of us are subject to difficult times. And sometimes just long times of unavoidable unhappiness. And it's miserable, we don't like it.

But some seem to settle into darkness, and they reside there permanently. Deliberately deciding to stay in the pits. They find their comfort zone. And as we might say they are being forsaken as the scripture would say. Abandoned, forgotten. And some people take their identity from this attitude and would not recognize themselves in any other way. If individuals can take that persona on, a personality like that, so too can communities and even nations.

Oppressed, economically endangered, vulnerable groups often internalize their experience and they become locked into a cycle of thinking poor. People suffering long-term illnesses often with disabilities may treat themselves or retreat into themselves and find suffering until they forget what their other limitations are. Everything is identified by how they're living and how they're feeling. Their sole limitations are the things that limit their existence.

Just as wage-earners can lose sight of the fact that they are more than their jobs. We all too easily get lost in the roles we play or the events in our lives that sweep us up or down and carry us where we are not willing to go. And once there we are in danger of not making our way back to the truer, richer selves; our true selves.

Perhaps that was the experience of the people in the Old Testament lesson in Israel. When the prophet delivered his oracle from God. The Israelites were used to being jeered as the forsaken by foreign peoples. Because of the hardships they had been facing. Famine, war, exile. Made them desolate, made them seem that they were abandoned by the God they prayed to for help. And they wondered does God hear us? Does God care about us? And perhaps the Israelites realized that they were indeed forsaken. They were indeed abandoned and desolate.

As the saying goes, "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names only hurt us when we believe that's who we really are." So, Isaiah proclaimed the message that God had a name for Israel too. God says you are my delight, my delight. And if Israel just would hold on to that true identity and whisper these comforted names in the dark of their exile. They would only be one step toward regaining that light. Persons who believe that nothing good could happen to him or her probably will reject or rename anything good that shows up on their radar screen. Just to suit their self-fulfilling prophecy. So, they get to the

depths of their being and they seem to just wallow in it. And they project that to everyone and with everyone they live with.

But we're different. You and I are people called to be the people of hope. The delight of God, no less. Do we believe that as the people of Israel believed that he said to them you are my delight? Do we believe that? In the way we live, in the way we act. In the way we talk? Think about that just a moment. Do we really live that out? Do we accept that identity that God has given us?

There are two ways that we can really approach this. One is to say this is how things are. Have you ever said that? And the other way is, this is how they could be. At Canaan of Galilee, Mary of Nazareth shows us what those possibilities are. When we refuse to give our surrender to what is. In place of what could be. That's when it happens.

But at the wedding that day there was an obvious shortage of wine that threatens to break up their celebration. And wedding parties then could last for an entire week. Can you imagine partying for an entire week? Can you imagine how much wine it takes for that party? So however long it took to run out no wine spelled the end of the party. That was it. They could decide just like everyone else did. As they would squeeze the wine skins and find out they were empty, and no more wine would go home.

But Mary went to the one sure source of every Christian celebration over the next 2,000 years that could help the situation. And reported the situation, they have no wine, they were out of wine. And these weren't words of resignation. They weren't words of defeat. They were expectant words that she would say to her son. Anticipating his response. Now his response, if you heard that reading well, sounds kind of harsh doesn't it. Part of Jesus when he says, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me, my hour has not yet come." He's basically

saying to her, "Leave me alone. There are more important things that I should be doing." But it is in the eye of the mind of a mother to see beyond the present time as she turns to the servants and says, "Do whatever he tells you."

Jesus told them to fill the jars and take some to the chief stewards to make them leave. After tasting the water that had become wine, he tested that it was far better than the wine which had been offered first. He said to the bridegroom, "Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine last to the guests who have already become drunk and wouldn't know the difference. But you've kept the good wine until now."

Typically, that is humanity's way. And we can best describe it by the way the stewardess says most people would serve the good wine first and then keep diminishing the quality and bringing the cheap inferior wine. In other words, people live up with a good public front. Often living inferior lives privately, secretly all within their selves and growing in that deep, dark pit that many of us find ourselves in.

Our gospel writer John calls this the first sign of the signs and reveal the glory of Jesus' comments. At the end he says, and the disciples believe in him. Which is an echo of the first chapter of John which says we beheld his glory. The glorious presence of the son of God. And from his fullness we have received grace upon grace. The law was given through the purification rituals of Moses, but grace and truth were given through Jesus Christ. It was from his fullness that we all have received grace upon grace upon grace upon grace. All of us have received that.

Jesus's disciples believed him. Not only because of the miracle but because they tasted the new wine that he offered. The new wine that changed their lives. In this is a challenge for you and me. For our lives. To change by the power of Christ so that we can endure to the end. The

taste of new wine of community with our whole church so that we can walk through the present and the future with Jesus Christ. Knowing full well, that there will times of trial and testing, but we can make it successfully. Water into wine is the transformation that God pulls out to all of us. Within all our own lives. The creative, the imaginative change like the change of the disciples. That change can be ours. Which only God can offer through the only begotten son, Jesus Christ.

In prayer book, there's some memorable words in the celebration of the Eucharist and you will hear them again in a moment. When the celebrant says, "For in the last days you sent him to be incarnate from the virgin Mary to be the savior and redeemer of the world. In him you have delivered us from evil and made us worthy to stand before you. In him you have brought us out of error and of truth. Out of sin into righteousness. Out of death into life." For me that last sentence sums up what the miracle of water become wine really means. In our relationship to Christ, we have a way, we have a path on which we can walk. For it is Jesus Christ who gives us thy grace the ability to be brought for error into truth, from sin into righteousness. And above all from death to live eternal. Thanks be to God for that. Amen.