

January 17, 2016 Water into Wine John 2:1-7

Ever notice that weird things happen at wedding receptions. There are scores of movies exploring every possible mishap, mistake or misunderstanding; shows detailing every kind of misadventure, misspeaking and misgiving when it comes to wedding celebrations. Weddings are watershed moments and always about more than just two people tying the knot. When the wine begins to flow people and relationships just seem to come unraveled at these momentous events. Sometimes we have to unexpectedly face their impact and what it all means in our own lives. I have quite a few interesting stories and I'm certain most have a story or two?

In this morning's reading John is telling more than a wedding reception story here. This inaugural story of **Jesus'** public ministry is chuck-full of signs and symbols. In the Gospel according to John everything is presented symbolically. It is written in a symbolic language recognized by the faithful. So, John's **Jesus** says everything about himself that we wish the other gospels would say about **Jesus**. Only in John's gospel does **Jesus** tell us who he is, but only in metaphor, signs and symbol.

I am the Bread of Life,

I am the Light of the World,

I am the Good Shepherd,

I am the True Vine.

I am the Way the Truth and the Life.

Great but these symbols and metaphors need some serious unpacking.

So, in this morning's reading John is telling more than a wedding reception story. He is telling us something vitally important through signs and symbols.

The beginning of Jesus' public ministry begins out of nowhere with "***On the third day.***" Big things happen in the Scriptures on the third day and in particular it points forward to the resurrection of **Jesus *on the third day.***

Jesus' ministry begins with "***there was a wedding***". Marriage imagery is everywhere in the scriptures: **God's** covenantal relationship to Israelis always depicted in

marriage metaphors. John is suggesting a new covenant in Jesus. The union of heaven and earth in the seven days of Creation, 3 heaven, 4 earth, 3+4=7.

In **John's** story, all the wine has been consumed ahead of schedule. This is a metaphor for **John's** time as they witness the destruction of the temple and the expulsion of the followers of **Jesus** from the synagogue tradition. Again he is telling more than wedding reception stories here. The old religious system John believes has simply run out, gone dry. But someone quite glorious has arrived who transforms everything: Transforms our washing water into spirits in heavenly proportions, some 750 bottles of wine worth of vintage heavenly abundance (860 bottles by imperial measure.)

This is what the story of **Jesus** is about, says John—the marriage between heaven and earth: a new covenant enacted. And what's more it is a wedding celebration at which the wine never runs out and the best is saved to the last. It is the best wedding story ever told. John says this was the first sign, the first glimpse of the glory in this union, this marriage of heaven and earth in a human being.

When we begin to get it that there is a profound union, a unity connecting and transcending all creation:

When we grasp and celebrate *God in all things and all things in God.*

Then **water is turned into wine** in our lives and we too get glimpses of the glory. We realize we are at the same wedding feast as our gospel lesson. The sacred marriage of heaven and earth comes alive in us. We toast a new covenant.

I've seen and heard and experienced this glory at different times over the past year as we have faithfully worked and worshiped together. Remember those times when we were just radiant: Times when we just couldn't stop smiling or rejoicing: Times when we felt connected to the beauty of life and living?

The Application for Epiphany

With **Jesus**, we are becoming the *new wine* of **God's New Day**.

“Aha! Water into Wine!” Praise be to **God!** Hymn #87 *I am the Light of the World*

1 Cor. 12: 1-11

Families are funny things. They can love us, support us, teach us, bless us, protect us and drive us crazy, often all at the same time.

Churches are funny things too. They are often like families. They can love us, support us, teach us, bless us, protect us and drive us crazy, all at the same time. All these aspects were going on in the Corinthian church.

In our reading today, **Paul** addresses ‘the drive us crazy’ part of life together. He addresses the divisions: the sibling rivalries that create disruption and separation. With all the spiritual gifts and wonderful support given; with all the love and kindness shared, with all the teaching and blessing bestowed, some people were getting proud and haughty about which spiritual gifts were more advanced and therefore superior.

The ecstatic experiences group, that is people who experienced visions and speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues, assumed that they were better, more blessed and certainly special. And in their ecstatic way let the other people know it.

Now, we know special people like this!
They have a need to be right, or an all or nothing attitude,
or a “my way or the highway” outlook.
They have a tendency to compare or compete,
to make it more about themselves than the gift given.
And so the gifts of **God** can get distorted by these ways of excessive self-referencing.

We also know that some of the spiritual gifts experienced or expressed back then are not understood in the same way today. In fact gifts evolve to better serve the changing needs of our faith communities.

Visions, faith healing and miraculous acts,
tongues and interpreting them are replaced today by gifts like

*paying it forward, an attitude of gratitude,
being radiant, deep respect for all life,
and the humility to do no harm.*

Paul tells them and us that all spiritual gifts come from **God** and therefore, all gifts are of equal importance. There is no superiority, no hierarchy. All gifts belong to **God** and are to be exercised, used, to bring about the **Dream of God**. The gifts are not about us! They are about establishing **God's New Day** in our day.

Now let's apply this passage to the wider world, spaceship earth. It is time to recognize that all spiritual gifts from **God** are not just limited to our Christian tradition. In our mass media age we no longer live in the spiritual silos of the past. Many might still inhabit their separate religious silos, still caught up in religious self-referencing, but spiritually aware folk are connecting across traditions to share the unity of the Spirit in all things. Spiritually aware folk are recognizing we are all one family, all receiving spiritual gifts from the same source.

Spiritual insights and teachings;
spiritual activities that support or protect;
spiritual practices of prayer and care,
spiritual disciplines of compassion and forgiveness;
spiritual gifts exercised for the wellbeing of other and the common good are divinely inspired, no matter the tradition.

We can learn a lot from the best practices of other spiritual traditions because the same Spirit gives the gifts. There is no right or wrong with **God's** gifts, just different styles, different histories and different shaping contexts. When we lighten up about our specific context, and let go of the old "our way or the high way" we can accept Truth where ever we find it: When we ease up on having to be right and others having to be wrong, we can accept what helps no matter where it comes from. When we let go of the old self-referencing, compare or compete approach to life, we can just accept **God's** way of blessing regardless of who offers it. When we are not protecting the past through control or reacting against the past by fixing, we can accept the new spiritual gifts **God** gives.

When we humbly share or openly receive **God** given gifts they resonate in any human heart. They empower any seeking soul. This becomes the telling sign of a spiritual gift rightly exercised for the world today.

Is it good for everyone's wellbeing?

Does it build up **God's** Dream for all humanity?

Is it respectful of other ways?

Application for Today

Accept Truth wherever you find it.

Accept what helps, from whom ever offers it;

Accept new possibilities, from unexpected sources,
for the Mystery in the midst of life is behind it all.

Hymn #588 VU vss. 3,4,5 Many Are the Light Beams

Keeping the Faith

**Now, we recognize that spiritual gifts are given
through all religious traditions
by the same Spirit.**

**So we lighten up about our own religious context,
and accept Divine Truth
where ever we find it.**

**We ease up on having to be theologically correct
and open up to what helps humanity,
no matter where it comes from.**

**We let go of the old religious self-referencing,
and just accept God's way of blessing the world
regardless of who offers it.**

**We humbly share and openly receive God given gifts
knowing they resonate in any human heart.**

Because the Mystery in the midst of life is behind them all.