



SAINT LUKE'S

“WATER INTO WINE”

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

ISAIAH 62:1-5

PSALM 36

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11

JOHN 2:1-11

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

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Jesus specializes in transformation. People are healed; bodies and souls are restored; lives are set free; bread and fish are multiplied. This is the first of seven miracles recorded in John. Each miracle is more spectacular than the one before, culminating in the raising of Lazarus from the dead. In John's gospel only, there is this first miracle of Jesus: water becomes wine at a family wedding. Running out of wine at a multi-day wedding feast was socially embarrassing in Hebrew hospitality codes. Yet I don't think Jesus changes water into wine simply so that the host can save face. Wine is not even essential for survival – water and food are – and we may think that changing water into wine is a relatively trivial use of divine power, but this is not a miracle about survival and essentials. This is a miracle of joy, abundance and celebration.

Jesus' response to his mother invites comment. It is disconcerting. In fact, Mary is not even given a name in John's gospel. I was reminded recently that Jesus' response translates harshly because it is a Greek translation of a Hebrew idiom.¹ *Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?* translates idiomatically as: "It's alright". Or today we might paraphrase it: "Relax. I've got this."

Most importantly, John describes his miracles as *signs*. Signs by definition point beyond themselves. This is the first material clue in John to Jesus' divinity. Even in this first sign, there are echoes of the future. It is "the third day" (the Resurrection Day after three days in the

¹ Readings in John's Gospel: William Temple

grave); it is a “feast” (a foretaste of the heavenly banquet) and it prefigures a Eucharist (then as now, Christ supplies the wine). Who is hosting who, at this banquet? Jesus is a guest, yet creates the wine for the celebration to continue. Jesus cares and ministers to the details of our earthly lives.

Yet Jesus does not draw attention to his power. Jesus lets the bridegroom get the credit for the good wine and hospitality. The servants who draw the new wine know what has happened. The steward doesn’t, the bridegroom and guests don’t seem to know. It is ironic when John says that in this sign Jesus “revealed his glory”. Rather, Jesus usually waits for people to notice. The disciples begin to notice. Though their understanding is still rudimentary, they begin to believe.

The revealing of Christ depends on our noticing Jesus’ presence and power within our lives. We are asked like the disciples to look beneath and through events to see what the events point to. If Jesus creates a miracle at a family celebration, he can do it anywhere through the power of the Holy Spirit alive now. Where is the new wine of Cana in your life? Where is Jesus at work in you and around you? As we do an interior and exterior scan of the landscape of our lives, we might think: Nowhere. There is nowhere that I see Jesus acting in my life right now. If we respond that way, I invite us to look again, with Epiphany eyes.

Today, one of the ways I see Jesus’ transforming work is in the troubling of the waters. The presence of Jesus is not always soothing and

comforting. Sometimes wounds need surgery or cleaning before real healing can happen. The deeper the wound, the more true this is. This weekend, as we honor the transforming work of Martin Luther King, we know Jesus was the driving force behind King's work. King confronted the deep wound of white racism in America – a wound still not healed. Jesus is in movements of resistance and protest now: speaking out against white racism, and discrimination of all kinds, against ageism, misogyny and the dehumanizing of non-citizens, in the fight for healthcare for all. Jesus is in holy dissent. Jesus is the heartbeat of every movement for liberation and freedom. The vision and hope of justice, peace and freedom is in every human being and known by many names. The *source* of the hunger and the courage to strive for justice is planted in us as the image of God in every human being. We know where true north is on the moral compass because of God's image in us. God implants the hope for a better country deep in the heart of every soul.

Today I see encouraging work going on even in modern entertainment. Popular shows are taking on issues of profound importance in our society today. "The Newsroom" did that. "The Good Fight" does that. "Madam Secretary" recently did a plotline in which the lead character was jailed for fighting a detention center for separated immigrant children. I saw the movie "Brexit" this week, which details the use of digital profiling to influence voters. More than entertainment, this is informative and penetrating analysis of our culture and society. Of course, plotlines are often wrapped up more neatly than reality allows.

They may not do it perfectly but they are portraying values-driven questioning, dissent and concern in mainstream entertainment, around issues that really matter. Art is imitating and commenting on life, in a way far beyond “Leave it To Beaver” and “The Brady Bunch”. Technology is engaging in the struggle for justice and civil rights in a new and transformative way.

With Epiphany eyes, let us notice Jesus at work wherever the Holy Spirit provokes our conscience and inspires people to question and to act towards justice and thriving for all of God’s children. Let us celebrate the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our time wherever we notice it, and let us join in wherever and however we can.

AMEN

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