

"Be Watching When the Wine Runs Out"

January 17, 2010

John 2:1-11

This sermon was preached by Pastor Kurt Jacobson at Trinity Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, grace and peace to you all.

I was new at Faith Lutheran Church as their intern when three weeks into the year my supervisor sent me out to make my first solo nursing home visits. With a list in hand of people he wanted me to see, and a map of Galveston County, Texas, I set out to a neighboring town to find Bayview Nursing Home - a county owned and operated facility.

Driving for the first time through bayou country, I was wondering what would I find at this nursing home. My exposure to these facilities was limited to Christmas caroling with the youth group during high school years. I wondered what I would learn from the people on my list: Betty Lou, Walter and Letha - long time Faith Lutheran Church members.

After about a 15 minute drive I saw a sign that said "Nursing Home" and soon I was approaching a rather imposing looking building. Upon entering I encountered a receptionist sitting behind a thick glass security window. "May I help you?" she asked without a smile. "Hi, I'm the intern pastor from Faith Lutheran Church in Dickinson. I'm here to see some of our members" and I added "Why the security for a nursing home?" The stern woman's demeanor cracked and she chuckled, "Honey" - she said, "You're at Human services" - the nursing home is the wing down that hallway" and she pointed with a thick finger and wink of her eye.

Moving quickly I found the rooms of the three Faith Lutheran members and found no one. I was about to give up when Brenda, whose name tag told me she was the Activities Director, caught me looking lost and dejected. "Are you looking for Letha?" she asked. I said - "Yes! And Walter and Betty Lou" "You're in luck, they're all at recreation and it starts in just a few minutes." She pointed me down another hallway. "Recreation," I thought to myself. "This, I've got to see."

Entering a patio area there sat several residents, most in wheelchairs, all patiently waiting - and completely silent. No one talked. No one smiled.

No one said hello. Barely anyone noticed I had come onto the patio without assistance. No one moved.

"Recreation" huh? Brenda entered and she introduced me to everyone in the circle and had me stand behind them. "Honey, I don't want you to get hurt" - and I got my second wink of the day.

Brenda began having the residents do head and neck movements. Obediently, they followed her guidance. (Movement) Next, arms were engaged. After a few minutes of loosening and stretching Brenda reached in a big bag and a beach ball went flying. She threw it to one of the residents - then another until everyone was brightening and laughing and smiling. This circle of elders had come to life - incredibly transformed by some movement and a beach ball.

What started suddenly, stopped just the same. Brenda took the ball, put it back in the bag. The group became silent and still again. The residents were wheeled back to their rooms. Yet, for a few minutes I had the opportunity to see something about these people that I never dreamed I would see. I saw their spirits, and a light come upon their lives. I saw in them a glimpse of some glory.

In today's Bible reading, Jesus works a miracle and gives a glimpse of his glory. The setting isn't a nursing home, but a wedding reception. He's there with his mom and siblings enjoying it all - and then the wine runs out! Here's how the story goes from there:

Mary, Jesus' mother prods him do something about the wine shortage. Jesus doesn't seem to take very well to his mama's concern about the empty glasses. Yet, without delay Jesus orders the servants to bring him six jugs and tells them to fill them with water. They do and then Jesus instructs them to take a taste from the jug to the head server. They obey. The head server tastes the water (now become wine) and declares:

"Everyone serves the good wine first...but you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus' first miracle is complete. Party on.

Is there anything you find a bit odd in this miracle? The Bible tells us about many other miracles Jesus enacts. They include healings, multiplying food to feed thousands, even raising a man from the dead. But here in his first miracle, who's healed? Who's fed? Who's brought back to life?

This miracle is odd. Jesus says nothing to enact it. Be beyond that, this miracle is seemingly unnecessary, isn't it? The wedding guests could have gone without more wine. Doesn't Jesus have more important miracles to do that address critical needs of people? So why this miracle and of what benefit is it for us to know about water becoming wine?

The insight comes in the quick exchange between Jesus and his mom. When the wine runs out, Mary comes to Jesus and says "They have no wine." She expects he can do something about it. He brushes her off!

Then look at what he says next: "My hour has not yet come."

What "hour," Jesus? Mary doesn't ask. It's the hour of his death - that hour when he would be nailed to a cross and his power unleashed on the world. At that hour, the darkness between us and God's power for life would be pierced and all the world would be able to see the glory of God.

But back to this biblical story today. Jesus says "My hour has not yet come" though then he gives us a little glimpse - a peek at God's glorious power to provide! In turning water to wine, Jesus shows us that he is the source of hope - thru what He will do with his power - he will provide for people and it will be glorious.

Jesus' own life wasn't glorious. He would be humiliated, misunderstood, ridiculed and rejected. His hour, when it finally came, would be one of intense pain and incredible despair.

The miracle of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding party sends a message that God would provide. And here's the key learning in this miracle: God would be standing beside Jesus no matter what would come his way - even when "his hour had come."

There are times in our lives when we wonder if God provides. When the wine runs out, we wonder if Jesus is even nearby.

Since Tuesday evening I've been asking that question on behalf of the people of Haiti. It seems as if the wine has run out for them - almost as if "their

hour has come." I have friends who live in Haiti. Some are native Haitians. Others are Americans who work for Beyond Borders, an organization I hope you'll support in light of this disaster. Beyond Borders has talented people who have dedicated their lives to bringing hope to people in that despairing country. The white guy in the photo on the right is Kent Annan. I met Kent on my last trip to Haiti. He wrote yesterday to tell me that many of his colleagues are not yet accounted for and some of his friends have died. Kent is anguished. He writes: *I believe in the God who multiplied fish and loaves to feed the hungry. I believe in the God who says "I'm always with you." And right now, it's achingly clear--heartbreakingly, angrily clear--isn't it, that we who believe also believe in the God who is hidden sometimes, sometimes when we are most in need.*

I've been to Haiti twice in the past ten years - and have never seen such a difficult way of life. In Haiti, finding safe water to drink usually involves a long walk. Hospitals are primitive and rare. Streets and highways are literally falling apart. Electricity, even in the capital city of Port au Prince may be on a few hours a day - often in the middle of the night. And these sorts of conditions existed **before** a massive earthquake ripped apart what little functioning infrastructure there was to provide for people.

I've been wondering where Jesus is in this horrific event. Will he show up to turn another miracle, bringing some glimpse of glory that will provide the motivation of hope.

Then I remembered a Sunday morning in Haiti. As the church filled for Mass that day, the most beautiful people were walking from their little shacks. Not long into Mass, I noticed they had changed. The music lifted their spirits. Their voices soared. I was amazed to see their joy, their faith when so much of their daily lives looked difficult and despairing compared to mine. And then there was the wine - the wine of the Lord's Supper - the new wine of hope and life given and shed for them through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. In that Mass those people were transformed just like those nursing home patients in Texas. There was a glimpse of glory. New hope.

So in the midst of my own angst for my friends in Haiti, I'm trusting God is at work giving a

glimpse of glory through the Church once again – and through a whole world of people with abilities and resources to bless the them with all that they need.

My friend Kent finished his letter to me yesterday writing: *“I’m asked, ‘How do you keep any hope?’ My answer, which is burrowed deep in my bones through the privilege of living ... and working alongside many Haitians. It is this: If the Haitians haven’t given up hope, we have no right to. Today I saw on CNN Haitians walking the streets of Port-au-Prince singing hymns and praying. I sense that you haven’t given up hope either. Thank you. We’re people committed to be on the side of God’s hope, even on seemingly hopeless days.*

This miracle of Jesus on the face of it doesn’t seem all that important. Water into wine? Not that important. But behind the miraculous is the meat for our hope. When we face experiences that diminish our faith or dull our spirit; when we question whether Jesus is really here or that he cares - think of the wine and see Jesus. You might just get a glimpse of glory that will make a difference.

In this coming week, I’m guessing there will be challenges in your life. You might even find the wine run dry. Where will Jesus show up then? I don’t have an answer for you – but I hope you’ll be looking.

What I know right now is that there is a glimpse of glory ahead for us all - right here. In the Lord’s Supper you are welcome - no matter the state of your life or your heart. Come and find the **good** wine now, given and shed for you - and for all - to transform our lives and our living today with the hopeful and glorious presence of Jesus. Amen.