

## GLORY REVEALED

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First Presbyterian Church of Bordentown

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday After Epiphany

(Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday weekend)

Isaiah 62:1-5, Psalm 36:5-10, John 2:1-11

The wedding invitation came to Mary, and another one to “Jesus and companion”. He RSVP’d with the names of his new traveling buddies: Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. The host was one of the simple families in Cana, and they had pulled out all the stops for this week-long wedding bash. It’s now been about 5 days. And although they all traveled together, the boys have been on their own, when Jesus’ mother leaves her band of female friends and approaches Jesus. “Son, the wine’s run out! I’d hate to see our host, the Joneses, so embarrassed . . . why we’ve been friends since you were knee-high to a grasshopper . . . we should do something!”

So . . . maybe she meant for Jesus to send Andrew to the local convenience store, or maybe they had some wine back at the inn where they were staying. We really don’t know. But in any case, Jesus blew her off. After all, he was in deep conversation . . . Simon Peter had noted a dramatic decline in fish prices that was affecting his former partners, and this had led to some congratulatory words about their second career fishing for people.

“Son!” “Yes, Mom, I heard you . . . but it’s not our party. And I’m not sure that this issue is on my Father’s agenda for me.”

Mary waved him off and called the caterers over . . . “Boys, please do whatever my son tells you. He’s a great problem solver, and I’m sure he’ll find a way to salvage the Jones’s reputation.” Now these folk knew Mary — she had been their babysitter, and her recommendation had helped them get this job. So, they did as she said. But when they heard what Jesus asked, they winced . . . 20-30 gallons of water in each of the six jars . . . well, they’d better just get on with it – the water wouldn’t weigh less if they delayed.

Some time later, Jesus instructs these same guys to scoop a small punch cup’s worth of the water and take it to the wine steward. The steward’s eyes grow wide . . . “This is the best!” he exclaims. “Wonderful bouquet with hints of raspberry and chocolate! Mr. Jones is full of surprises — I’ve never known anyone to bring out the best wine on the last days of the celebration.”

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I’ve told this story in a way that illustrates Jesus’ humanity. We see him many times in social interaction . . . even to the point that he’s accused of being a drunk. And not only a drunk, but one who associates with low-lives. From the perspective of 2000 years, we can appreciate that Jesus enjoyed spending time with friends. He undoubtedly laughed . . . in fact, it’s hard to imagine him at this week-long wedding party without a little joke-telling, and some painful but funny anecdotes about the groom in his younger years.

But that’s not all this story is about. Just as the host was understood as saving the best wine till last, God’s gift of Jesus is his very best gift to Israel and the world. His best gift was not in Israel’s past, when he gave Moses the law and Israel the land.”<sup>1</sup> This gift is “in the flesh”. *And the Word became flesh and lived among us – and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.* That’s how John

begins his Gospel, his version of this Good News. And now John ends the Cana wedding story with, ***Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory.***

Author Tom Wright sees this sign as one in a series of clues . . . seven clues, embedded in John's gospel, because seven is the number of completion, or perfection.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly this first sign transforms the imperfection of only 6 jars of water, used for obeying Jewish law, into the beginning of the revelation of Jesus as the one and only complete manifestation — or epiphany — of God. The law, symbolized by the six jars of water for purification rites, is transformed. The cumbersome, burdensome law, wielded as a club by the leaders of the Temple, will give way to the rule of love, which is, itself, a return to the simplicity of the *shema* of Deuteronomy, the "Great Commandment," ***Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*** In Matthew and Mark, Jesus pairs it with Leviticus 19:18 – perhaps the only time you'll hear me cite Leviticus! – ***you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.***

Listen to Tom Wright's description of the seven signs or clues, and how they are used by John:

"[John] is setting up a series of signposts to take us through his story. The signs are all occasions when Jesus did, you might say, what he'd just promised Nathanael that he would do. They are moments when, to people who watch with at least a little faith, the angels of God are going up and coming down at the place where Jesus is. They are moments when heaven is opened, when the transforming power of God's love bursts in to the present world. . . . The wedding is a foretaste of the great heavenly feast in store for God's people. The water-jars, used for Jewish purification rites, are a sign that God is doing a new thing from within the old Jewish system, bringing purification to Israel and to the world in a whole new way."<sup>3</sup>

William Willimon expands the significance of these 120-180 gallons of wine. He notes that it "is far more than the amount required to purify this crowd. . . . One cup of water would purify a hundred people, so these jars contain water enough to purify the whole world. The water thus symbolizes the overwhelming grace available through Jesus, who has come 'so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life'."

Imagine the sheer abundance of those vats of exquisite wine — God's abundant grace is revealed in Jesus' compassionate miracle.

So how might the story play out today?

There's a 30-year old bartender named Doc Hendley, one of CNN's Heroes of the Year for 2009. This young guy first learned about the world's water crisis when he took a break from college and his job as a bar-keep, to travel the world, hoping it would ground his education and provide some direction. Well, it did. "I began seeing the figures [of] people that don't have access to clean water -- and it absolutely floored me," he recalls.

He learned that at least one in six people worldwide lack access to adequate amounts of safe water for drinking and hygiene, according to the UN. This translates to 1.5 million preventable deaths each year.<sup>4</sup>

After returning to school, Hendley began setting up wine-tastings at which he provided information about the global crisis. By graduation, Hendley's "Wine to Water" events had yielded enough funding to implement water projects in the developing world. He has since worked in five developing countries, bringing safe drinking water to more than 25,000 individuals in refugee camps, orphanages, schools, hospitals and a leper colony, as well as directly into hundreds of homes through the installation of bio-sand filters.

“You can be a bartender in Raleigh, North Carolina; you can be just a regular anybody. And you really, really can change the world,” he says. “You can touch thousands of lives. I’m walking truth [proof?] of that.”

I suspect that in this century, in this crisis for so many around the world, and brought into stark relief by the catastrophe in Haiti, Mary would say “the water’s run out.” And Jesus might adopt Hendley’s motto, “Wine to Water.”

To the Glory of God. Amen.

CHARGE & BENEDICTION: (from Bordentown’s homepage)

**We are witnesses to the grace and love that we have received as individuals and as members of the body of Christ. We commit ourselves to nurturing the fruit of the Spirit in the family of God. We welcome as a privilege our responsibility to act as God’s people in our community and world.**

### ENDNOTES

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1. Dick Donovan, *SermonWriter* for Jan. 17, 2010
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    1. The wine at Cana (2:1-11).
    2. The healing of an official's son, also performed at Cana (4:46-54).
    3. The healing of a sick man (5:1-9).
    4. The feeding of the five thousand (6:1-14).
    5. Walking on the sea (6:15-21).
    6. The healing of the man born blind (9:1-34).
    7. The resurrection of Lazarus (11:38-44), as per Dick Donovan, *SermonWriter* for Jan. 17, 2010. Donovan notes that some scholars combine numbers 4 & 5, so that Jesus’ resurrection becomes the 7<sup>th</sup>. (However, if a sign is pointing to something, perhaps the resurrection should not be included in the 7 anyway.)
  3. Tom Wright, *John for Everyone, Part One*, pp. 21-22.
  4. <http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/04/30/heroes.doc.hendley/index.html>. *Bartender Helps Turn Wine to Water in Developing World*. The specific cause is diarrhea, which I decided not to mention from the pulpit on my first Sunday!