
What Did Jesus Turn The Water Into?

A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Second Sunday after the Epiphany – Year C

*You have kept the good wine until now!
Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee,
and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. (John 2:10-11)*

What if it wasn't wine?

What if it wasn't wine that Jesus was turning water into? What if it were ice cream? There was a big party, maybe a birthday party, with lots of running around and singing and hollerin', and they ran out of ice cream? That would be a disaster, an embarrassment to the hosts of such a boisterous occasion.

Or what if it were a morning gathering, and the meeting organizers had secured a grand terrace balcony, overlooking an ocean somewhere, with warm elegant morning tables all set up, and they ran out of coffee? What if it wasn't wine that they ran out of, but coffee. Talk about complaining, first thing in the morning.

Whatever the occasion, we people appreciate certain extra ingredients, certain touches that make the gathering splendid and glorious! At weddings, we enjoy wine. At birthday parties, we enjoy ice cream. At morning meetings, we need coffee.

When these expected and usual ingredients don't show up, we get worried. We start complaining. "Who do I see about getting coffee served around here?" "How far is the ice cream store from here?" "Who planned this?"

When we complain, of course, we miss something. Our complaining runs the risk of missing the miracle, missing the gift. Because there can be another ingredient at that gathering, at any gathering, in fact. Jesus once said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them (Matthew 18.20)."

I don't know exactly how it happened, that the water became wine. Or that the water became ice cream. Or that the water became coffee. But I do know that Jesus uses ordinary things to make miracles. In times of scarcity, or worry, or anxiety, the presence of Jesus shows us miracles. Jesus shows us abundance when everything looks scarce.

In our gospel story today, this famous passage about the wedding in Cana of Galilee, we obsess with the "water into wine" part. But the passage concludes with a fascinating sentence, that "Jesus revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him."

"Jesus revealed his glory," the sentence says. "Revealed" means "revelation;" it means a "showing forth." In fact, it means "epiphany." What happened was that Jesus shone forth at that wedding. Jesus revealed his glory; he epiphanied himself! It was an epiphany!

And what did Jesus show them? Well, one of the most simple ways to understand this story, is to say this: Jesus showed the crowd how to make do. Jesus showed the crowd how to make do with something else. That was a revelation! That was an epiphany!

"Sir, they have no wine." "Do you have to bother me with that worry? The time is not right yet. Go get what you do have." And they did have some things. They had stone water jars. And they had water.

No, I don't know exactly how it happened, that the water became wine. Or that the water became ice cream. Or that the water became coffee.

But I do know that Jesus did not create the wine out of nothing. Jesus used what the party did have at hand. Jesus used what was at hand. And, with Jesus as the added ingredient, what was at hand was creativity and hope. Jesus showed them the miracle of creativity.

When you are out in a boat fishing, and your line breaks, with your favorite lure on it, you have two choices. One is despair. Oh, the party's over; might as well go back to the house. But the other choice is creativity. Let's see what else is in the tackle box that we can make into an exciting lure.

Of course, at the beginning of the trip, or the beginning of the party, most of us love to show off our shiny, new lures, or whatever shiny new things we have: the new great wine, the glistening silverware, the fine china, the new recipe, and excellent bread, the tasty dishes. We like showing those things forth.

But, sooner or later, the end of the party starts to creep in. Maybe the first energy of the gathering has lagged a little bit. Maybe the band has left for a little while. Maybe I have no one to talk to. I have run out of wine, or ice cream, or coffee.

Maybe it is when you, yourself, have just celebrated a birthday, and you begin to wonder. Is this what I am here for, just to live another year just like the old one? Maybe it is when you are starting a new job. Maybe it is when your marriage is entering a new chapter, and a new year. Maybe it is when churches—we ourselves!—are entering a new era!

I am talking about when there is a break in the action, when there is a break in the fishing line, and we wonder what we will do. How about imagining? How about imagining the creativity of Jesus?

Jesus revealed himself at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, and Jesus reveals himself today, by taking something ordinary, and maybe even something old, and imagining it into something fresh and new. That miracle takes a special recipe. It takes special ingredients, like creativity and hope.

Jesus offers the miracle of creativity. Jesus offers the miracle of hope. When they ran out of wine, Jesus used water. When a man was blind, Jesus used dirt and spit. When five thousand people needed food, Jesus used what was at hand: five barley loaves and two fish.

Jesus uses what is at hand. Jesus makes new life by showing forth something out of the old life!

Yes, the story ends with this sentence, that Jesus "revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him." When Jesus revealed his glory, the scripture says, his disciples believed in him. "Believed in him."

Do you believe?

When I ask a question like that, I am not asking a question that has a formula as an answer. I am not asking you to recite a stiff and cerebral creed. I am asking, "Do you believe in the creativity of the person you love? Do you believe in your partner? Do you believe in your friend? Do you believe, in Jesus, like that?"

When we say we believe in someone, we are usually not agreeing to some contract. We are not signing off on a series of propositions and clauses.

To believe in someone means to put our heart in with theirs. It means to be in love with them. It means to be together with them.

When Jesus revealed his glory, his wondrous and creative glory, full of hope and life, his disciples believed in him. And I believe in him, too. I believe in his wondrous and creative glory, full of hope and life.

I know that some of us don't drink wine. Some of us don't eat ice cream. Some of us don't drink coffee. But maybe we take our joy in something else. Maybe it is peanut butter. Maybe it is honey. Maybe it is bread.

Maybe it is love. Maybe it wasn't wine that Jesus turned the water into. Maybe it wasn't ice cream or coffee either. Maybe it is love.

Yes, that is it! Jesus turns things into love.

Jesus turns ordinary things into love. Jesus reveals love from the ordinary things, and in the ordinary people, of

the world. That takes amazing creativity! I believe in that creativity. I believe in that epiphany. Jesus “revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.”

AMEN.

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