

A Feast in the Wilderness

January 17, 2010

(Epiphany 2 – Year C)

John 2: 1-11

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

I cannot think about the miracle of Jesus changing water into wine without thinking about summer camp.

As many of you know, Susan and I lead a session of summer camp every year at Camp Allen, for kids in third and fourth grade.

In the years when the theme of our camp session is on the Miracles of Jesus, then every morning, during the teaching time, we act out one of the miracles of Jesus.

Of course, the first miracle of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel of John, happens when Jesus is invited to a wedding in Cana of Galilee.

And during the camp teaching time, we ask for campers to volunteer to play the bride, the groom, the mother of the bride, the mother of Jesus and Jesus.

As the kids act out the story, the mother of the bride comes to the mother of Jesus in a panic.

The wine at the wedding reception has just run out.

The mother of Jesus goes to her son and informs Jesus:

“They have no wine.”

After Jesus protests and his mother pushes, Jesus finally relents.

This is when I ask the kids:

“Who wants to pour the water into the jug?”

Immediately, hands spring up into the air, and I pick a few kids to play the servants at the feast.

Now in a corner of the camp dining hall, we have a big, brown jug that we bought at Hobby Lobby.

And we have a large, clear pitcher of water, so that the kids can see the water.

The camper who is playing Jesus then tells the servants to pour the clear pitcher of water into the big, brown jug.

Then we let the campers take a ladle to dip into the jug.

And immediately, the kids' eyes get as big as saucers, because the water is now as red as wine.

The kids ask:

“Wow! - How did you do that?”

And our little secret to this trick that the kids do not see is this:

In the bottom of that big brown jug, there is an opened packet of Cherry Kool-Aid mix, so that when the water is poured into the jug, it makes the water turn as red as wine.

This hands-on teaching of the story of Jesus changing water into wine is a fun re-enactment of that first miracle of Jesus.

Yet the story of Jesus' changing water into wine is a serious story of miraculous abundance in the face of great need.

The mother of Jesus tells her son.

“They have no wine.”

And six stone water jars filled with 120 gallons of crystal clear water stand nearby.

So Jesus tells the bartenders to fill their carafes with this clean water.

And lo and behold, the carafes are filled, not with water or with cherry Kool-Aid, but they are filled with the best tasting merlot in the world.

Lo and behold, Jesus fills an urgent need, by providing an abundance of wine.

It has been impossible in this last week to not be affected by the overwhelming and urgent human need and tragedy that is unfolding in Haiti after the earthquake there.

As we have watched the horrific images on television in these last few days, we have all asked questions about God and about faith and about God's presence in the face of human suffering and need.

The needs in Haiti are huge.

There are needs for food and for medical help and for shelter and for engineers to pull concrete slabs off of human beings.

There are needs for clear and clean water.

So I have found myself struggling in this past week as I contemplated Jesus' first miracle at a wedding at Cana in Galilee.

Because while thousand of human beings in Haiti are in desperate need of clean drinking water,

The Son of God chooses for his first great miracle to take six jars filled with clean water to make 120 gallons of the finest merlot, just to keep a society wedding going past midnight.

While the mother of Jesus tugs on her son's robe and says:

"They have no wine,"

I find myself watching the coverage on CNN and tugging on Jesus' robe and saying:

"They have no water.

They have no homes.

They have no food or parents or family or friends."

I find myself watching CNN and asking God:

"You provided an abundance of wine at the wedding in Cana.

So God, where is your abundance now,

In the face of this urgent need?

Last Thursday night, I was watching CNN as Anderson Cooper was reporting from Port-au-Prince in Haiti.

Over his shoulder, it was pitch black because there was no electricity.

Anderson Cooper reported that in this darkness, he could not see any of the homeless people behind him.

But in the midst of the darkness, Anderson Cooper reported that he could plainly hear people's voices, people's voices singing.

These people of Haiti, who have no families or shelter or food or clean water,

These people in desperate need - were singing songs and hymns of praise to God.

When I heard the news report of the people in Haiti singing hymns of praise throughout the night, my mind immediately went to a story from the book of Exodus.

In this story, Moses and Aaron plead with the Pharaoh of Egypt.

Moses and Aaron plead:

“Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a feast in the wilderness.”¹

In the wilderness of the twisted rubble of concrete slabs, the singing people of Haiti celebrate a feast in the middle of the wilderness.

In the wilderness of homelessness and thirst and hunger, the people of Haiti are not only singing songs of grief and loss, but they are singing songs and hymns of praise to God.

In the wilderness, in the face of urgent need, the survivors in Haiti are dipping their ladles into the jug and drawing out the fine red wine of faith and hope and inner strength.

This morning, our personal problems are put into perspective.

None of us in this church today have had our homes or our church crumble into dust and ruin.

None of us in this church today have to worry tonight about clean water to drink or a home to sleep in.

Therefore, we should give generously to our sisters and brothers in Haiti who are suffering and are in need.

And although our problems might not be nearly as great, some of us in this church this morning *are* living in a wilderness and a place of need.

Some are in the wilderness of grief, grief over the loss of a loved one.

Some are in the wilderness of depression.

Some are in the wilderness of loneliness and of fear.

And we tug on Jesus’ robe today, pleading:

They have no wine.

They have no one to love.

They have no will to live.

They have no hope.

Yet Jesus sees the urgent needs of our hearts,

And he provides for us abundantly, setting a feast in midst of our wilderness.

¹ Exodus 5:1

For at Camp Allen with campers and red Kool-Aid,
At a wedding in Cana in Galilee,
At a devastated Port-au-Prince in Haiti,
At the center of our personal wilderness,
Jesus performs a great miracle.

He fills our hearts to the brim - with the fine red wine
Of hope.

AMEN.

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