

Date: Sunday January 17, 2010

Scripture: John 2:1-11

Title: “The Practicality of Jesus”

The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): God is present at all times and that presence is made known through the eternal life of Jesus Christ.

The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): We can see God this very day!

(Remember, it’s all about God!)

Mrs. Pope did not like the story of Jesus turning water into wine. So whenever the members of her junior high Sunday school class had the chance, they would make constant reference to the story. It didn’t matter what they had been discussing, anytime Mrs. Pope would ask, “Does anybody have any questions,” inevitably one of the students would ask something to the effect of “Mrs. Pope, why do you think Jesus turned water into wine and not Coca-Cola?” Contorting her face into a look of deep frustration, she replied every time she did not know but she would certainly ask God the first chance she got. Maybe if she had been there in Cana that day, Mrs. Pope would feel differently.

In a time before movies, basketball, soccer, and PTA meetings, the most exciting events in small towns like Cana were weddings. After the ceremony the bride and groom weren’t whisked away to the airport in Tel Aviv to fly to the Swiss Alps for a honeymoon. Instead the happy couple was paraded through the streets from the wedding ceremony to their new home. Then for seven days they entertained their families and friends. For any of you that are married, or for any

of us that have been to wedding receptions, how would we like that for a week after the wedding? In laws, family members and friends traipsing in and out of the family home for seven days?

Not to say that it would be all bad. Jesus and the disciples are enjoying this wedding. There is music, dancing, and food that would be a welcome sight. People are hugging, smiling, and laughing. But we all know how weddings are, something always goes wrong. The best man's tux is too small. The preacher loses his voice. The bride has a bad hair day. There's a long winded toast at the reception. Well sure enough, at this wedding, the hitch comes at the reception.

The wine runs out. An early tradition of this passage has it that Mary is the groom's aunt. She certainly acts as if she has been appointed to make sure everything goes right. "They're out of wine!" Mary says in the same way a wife might turn to her husband and say, "I can't get the lid off the pickle jar!" In other words, "Don't just stand there, do something." Mary says it with the voice of one who thinks she may end up as the only person in the world who knows how wonderful her boy is, if he doesn't do something soon. Otherwise, the newlyweds are going to be embarrassed. It's kind of like buying a roast for four people and then having eight people show up. It's like one year in Independence when I was to get the pizza for VBS. I thought I had enough to feed 30. I didn't. I went back for more. I was hoping for a way that I might turn cardboard into pizza.

Supplying wine for a wedding would not seem to be high on a list of miracles with which to begin a ministry. David Redding writes, "We could never guess that (Jesus) would fling away his first miracle as a light hearted bouquet to romantic

love in the middle of a noisy wedding party.”

But Jesus finally says in reply to his mother’s consternation, “Mother, I know. I’ll tend to it.” Six stone jars are there for the rites of purification. They represent the complex rules that the people of an ancient time struggle to keep. In filling these jars to the brim, Jesus says, “These laws just get in the way. Life is more joyful than this.”

Now we don’t have to have wine to have a good time. But in the ancient time a wedding was a burst of joy in the midst of the great hardships of life. Wine was a staple at any wedding and was most often the everyday drink of choice. When guests drink the wine of Christ, they taste joy. Jesus is not a magician doing some razzle-dazzle to garner applause. Today’s story from Luke reveals the goodness that God brings.

But the way John tells it, most of the people never know what happened. They are not paying attention, so they miss it. It is easy to miss almost anything. We get busy. We are distracted.

Could it be that some of the greatest acts are ones we miss? What could be worse than missing the gifts of grace, being bored in a fascinating world, feeling no joy in a house filled with children, being loved and feeling no gratitude, having a good job and dreading going to work, eating a bowl of ice cream and not noticing how good it tastes, living an entire day without realizing it is a gift? If we do not see signs of God’s presence it is usually because we are not paying attention. When the wine runs out the party is not over. There is a guest who takes care of it. God is forever changing the ordinary into the extraordinary.

We have no indication of the wedding party's response, but the disciples recognize the glory of God and understand this is a holy moment. God's presence is best seen by those who are looking.

Sometimes we catch sight of it for just a moment and see the glory and wonder at the heart of things. The window opens. Something comes between us and the well-known place or the faces we see every day, and for just a moment we see what is really there.

God's presence is revealed day by day, in pleasures large and small, in the joy of good food, laughter, conversation, romance. Every once in a while at a wedding, a family picnic, sitting at our kitchen table, or watching someone we love go out the door or come back in, we catch a glimpse. We wonder, "Is God really present or did I just imagine it?" Could it be that our imagination allows us to see the deep reality we ordinarily overlook?

The evidence is never conclusive, but it is there. The glory of God can be seen not only in sunsets and symphonies, but in the people we love, the people who love us, and the places that are home. When we recognize God as ever-present, then we will see even commonplace objects, mundane routines, and oh-so-familiar faces as they really are—covered with God's glory (Younger).

Now this is the place where I learned on Tuesday night about the earthquake in Haiti. As I was talking to my Dad the next day on the phone he said, "I wonder why the good Lord lets things happen like this earthquake." He really wasn't asking for an explanation. And that's OK. I wasn't ready to offer one and I'm still not. Bad things happen. But I do imagine that his question is a question that's on

the mind of a lot of people. Maybe even some of you.

We faced this same question following the Tsunami in late 2004. I said then it wasn't so much about how disaster happens but what happens following the disaster. That's the same focus today. This earthquake in Haiti may be the worst disaster to happen in our lifetimes in this part of the world. How we go about dealing with the aftermath will say a great deal about who we are as people of God.

I remember a moment in seminary when we talked about the practicality of our theology. The point was made that our theology is only as strong as being able to offer it to the people in need. I am unable to go into the midst of people terrorized by the cruel acts of dictator and talk about the loving presence of God. I could go into the midst of those people and show God's love through my presence and my actions helping in whatever ways they needed. When we can't be physically present, we can be in the midst of others through the power of prayer seeking God's will for needs. This is where most of us are with Haiti.

It is a challenge to come up with a connection between the goodness and joy of water to wine at a wedding celebration and the horror and destruction of the Haiti earthquake, except to say no matter our circumstance, God is with us and that presence is made manifest through the life, ministry, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As followers of Christ, we can help to make that presence known to one another right here and worldwide.

The late British theologian, Leslie Weatherhead, has said, "The opposite of joy is not sorrow. It is unbelief." I believe in God who is not the cause of the disaster, but who is there in the midst of the recovery. Unlike Mrs. Pope waiting to ask God

“why” some time yet to be, let us see and know God this very day and have others see and know God in us. When they do and we do it is very good news and that sounds very practical to me. Let us pray.

God of all places and times,

You are present in times of great joy and deep despair. We can forget to look for you in both times and easily miss you when we do remember to look. We hope your presence will be made abundantly clear to all people through our actions and the actions of others. With a special word of prayer for everyone living in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake, we offer this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. And we say, Amen.

Offering - As mentioned already this morning we can give to help those in Haiti, but all of our giving goes to support this congregation and our efforts to be about God’s will. The ushers will please . . .

Dedication – Lord, accept and bless this offering and we hope that however it is used, it will be about you and your goodness.

Benediction – As disciples of Jesus we have promised to serve. Go forth ready to serve in the name of Christ, blessed by God, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Go forth. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version; Harper Bibles: San Francisco; 2007.

Younger Brett; Lectionary Homiletics; www.goodprecher.com; 2010.