

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 17, 2010

Isaiah 62:1-5

1For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.
2The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.
3You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
4You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land Married;
for the LORD delights in you,
and your land shall be married.
5For as a young man marries a young woman,
so shall your builder marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.

John 2:1-11

1On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.
2Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3When the wine gave out, the mother of
Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you
and to me? My hour has not yet come" 5His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."
6Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty
or thirty gallons. 7Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim.
8He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 9When the
steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the
servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10and said to him,
"Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk.

But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

“Changing Water Into New Lives”

The good wine. When do you serve the good wine? On that special occasion, of course. You save the good wine for that special occasion and then you serve it.

The good wine. This was a good wine occasion. It was a wedding. Weddings in that time period were one of the places where people had good cause to dance, and sing, and celebrate. They were the occasions when it became abundantly clear that there were ones who knew how to have a good time. Joy and delight were the order of the whole affair.

A wedding was not merely an afternoon or even a day. A wedding was a weeklong joyous party celebration. Weddings, like now, were then a big deal. It was the groom’s family that hosted the event. It is fairly obvious how it works. When there is a wedding and a wedding reception too one needs to make sure that there are enough provisions for all the guests for the duration of the reception. To do otherwise is to not be hospitable to your guests.

On this occasion – the wedding at Cana – Jesus is there along with his mother. The two of them are guests at this wedding. There may have been other family of Jesus there, but we know for sure that his mother was there with him.

Along the way the wine gives out. It is gone. There is no wine left. There is none to be had. Aware that this will bring the wedding feast to a crashing halt, the mother of Jesus turns to him and says, in essence, “Do something.”

Without a serious interruption, or at least an infusion of wine, this party will come to an abrupt close. The guests will go home before the weeklong celebration is complete. This will not only truncate the fun but will bring insult to the groom, the groom's family, and the whole of the gathered community.

For this wedding feast things are rapidly changing.

We know about quick change in the church and in our world today. There is a book called "Blink." It is about the decisive glance—that in a fast two second look one can draw a conclusion. Oh, take a look at the church today. Blink your eyes and you barely need two seconds to see that things have changed.

There was a time when we thought we knew all about church and how it worked. You remember those days, don't you remember them? They were the days when the classrooms were all packed with children and each family filled a pew. Mom and Dad and 2.5 children all dressed up in their Sunday best. Everyone went to church. On your block it was not a question if you went, but rather where you went to church.

So some on your block came here—they came to the stately frozen chosen Protestant Presbyterian iteration of modern American Christianity. A few still came then because of the denominational label—but in our memory of how things were that couple blinks of a couple decades ago it wasn't the label but the services that were offered.

People came here to the "stately frozen chosen Protestant Presbyterian iteration of modern American Christianity" because of what they could get from what was provided here. There was a capitalist and consumerist understanding of congregationalism that for some has not yet vanished.

That capitalist/consumerist understanding works like this: You come here because of what you get out of coming here. The question is: “What does it hold for me?”

Blink. Take a look. The “stately frozen chosen Protestant Presbyterian iteration of modern American Christianity” is no more. Change. Ah change...dreaded change. That irksome word. That exasperating word.

There is always more going on that meets the eye. This story is in John’s Gospel. John’s Gospel, as I have told you on a number of occasions, has to be read in a careful way. It has to be read on two distinct and sometimes not so clearly related levels. On the one plane there appears to be a simple story being told. Yet there is this other plane going on that has this spiritual happening and awakening to it. It is on that plane that the reader is being shown how we are being drawn into the presence of God. It is almost like the presence of God is being drawn over us like a sheet.

This story about the water and the wine is one such story.

The wonderful figure of Mary is this beautiful presence in the story. She is the one that observes the wine is giving out and this will be a problem for the host. She draws the attention of Jesus to the reality of what is happening. Why?

Does she know something about him that we are about to learn? Does she expect him to do something about this situation? Is she expecting him to help out?

John, who records this story, doesn’t even name her here. “The mother of Jesus,” is how he puts it. The mother of Jesus, having drawn it

to his attention and having heard his response—“Woman, my hour has not yet come”—instructs the attendants to “do whatever he tells you.”

They are to fill the stone jars with water. It is large Rubbermaid trash can sized stone jars—six of them are to be filled with water. And when those stewards draw that water out—even before it is tasted—one can smell the aroma of change.

The water is not only wine—it is good wine. It is the best wine. It is the top notch, top drawer, reserves list wine. Good wine. Water changed into wine.

She, if you will, called it out of him. “Not yet,” he tells her. “Do whatever he tells you,” she instructs them.

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Ah, yes, it is John’s Gospel—so do not simply read it as water gone over to wine. Read it as more. Notice what is used—it is significant. There did not tend to be stone pots or jars of this magnitude just lying around at most wedding receptions. These were the implements of the old religion. These were the vessels that held the water for ritual washing as required in temple law.

It is no coincidence that they are the vessels Jesus wants filled with water. It is water changed to wine—yes, but more so it is a metaphor. It is a metaphor of Jesus’ ministry as he brings a new vitality to the ancient religion. Blink and it is changed.

Blink and the old institution of how things were have been transformed into the vitality of the Christ bringing on this extravagant and abundant presence of God.

It is all changing from the old lifelessness into the new wine of vitality in this “Word made flesh.” Read the signs, John says, this is but the

first one. See it. Take in the aroma of it. It has come. Mary, the mother of Jesus, she knows it. She sees it. She calls it forward in him at this wedding feast in Cana.

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Yes the question has changed. Oh church—that old capitalist/consumerist understanding asked, “what does this hold for me?” “What is in this for me?”

Blink. Take a look. The “stately frozen chosen Protestant Presbyterian iteration of modern American Christianity” is no more. Change.

Change because we have realized that the old question made it all about us. It is not sufficient. The old question never pointed beyond the self. It always left us empty and feeling like there has to be something more.

So as we started asking God, “What are we here for?”—we came to that clear purpose. “Changing lives and growing in God’s love.” That is Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church. That is who we are. As we ask God what are we to be about we hear God saying: “openness, joyful service, transformation, spirituality.” We hear God saying: “Changing lives and growing in love.”

We are less the “stately frozen chosen” and more “the people of God” as we ask the changed question. It is the point in which we become community with each other. It is the very point of our connection with each other.

The question is not “What can I get out of this?” The question is, “How many lives have I changed?” “How many lives can I change?” “How

many lives can we change?” “How many lives can we change with the love of God?”

Up until that point it had been a pretty good wedding reception there at Cana. There were all the traditions and it was just fine. But, then Jesus showed up. And then that water was put into that old form. From that water was drawn up this wine—this awesome, incredible, amazing, wowing wine.

It was wine unlike they had ever tasted. Never had they encountered anything this good. The ones who drew the wine out of those old vessels—they knew. They knew that it was Jesus. They knew he was the source. They knew it. They were witnesses to the transformation.

We are those witnesses. We are also those vessels from which Jesus is ready to draw this awesome, incredible, amazing, wowing wine. Jesus is ready to use us to bless this place and this community with love, joy, justice, and changed lives.

Up until this point—this life of ours has been pretty okay. But now, now, oh Church!, this is a special occasion. The new wine of Christ is here!

Now changing lives is what God is doing through us. And it is not a matter or even a question of “if”—it is a question of “how many?” How many lives have we changed? How many will we change with the love of God?