

2 EPIPHANY JANUARY 17, 2010 CYCLE "C"

TITLE: WATER, WINE, WHAT'S THE SIGN ?

READINGS: **Isa. 62:1-5, Ps. 36:5-10, 1Cor. 12:1-11, John 2:1-11**

Last Sunday we looked at the celebration of the Baptism of our Lord as the first feast in the earliest days of the church, because it was the official declaration of who Jesus was. The first Epiphany or manifestation of Jesus Christ. Later on came the Season of Advent, the celebration of Christmas and the Epiphany Season. Today we are lifted to a high point in learning about Jesus, for we are invited along with him to celebrate a wedding at Cana in Galilee. We are introduced by John our Evangelist to Jesus' first miracle. There he changes water into wine, "the first of his signs."

There is usually a close connection between the Old Testament reading and the Gospel pericope on any given Sunday. But not today. The only connecting link between our reading from Isaiah 62:1-5 and our Gospel is the wedding theme. Certainly a connection, but not the point, the sign John wants us to see. Speaking of weddings and, of course, marriage, did you hear about the pastor who was greeting his parishioners as they left Sunday morning service? Mary Ebermee came by in tears. "Oh, Mary," said pastor, "what's bothering you?" "I've got terrible news," replied Mary, "My husband passed away last night." "I'm so sorry," said pastor, "tell me, did he have any last requests?" "Yes," said Mary sheepishly, "he said, 'Please Mary, put down the gun.'" Or the widow who was showing her friend her big new diamond ring after her husband's funeral. "My, where did you get that?" her friend said. "Well," the widow replied, "my husband left me \$1,000 for a casket and \$5,000 for a stone.

Well, weddings during Jesus' time were very different from ours today. The celebration went on for many days and it was up to the host to see to it that there would be enough food and drink. Guests would also bring food and wine as gifts. Often those invited would have to travel many miles by donkey or just walking, so a wedding was never a one day affair as ours are. Thus we have a dilemma: at the wedding in Cana, the wine ran out. It was only 3 days into the wedding celebration. (Remember John includes many meanings into his Gospel. Three days may also refer to the 3 days Jesus was in the grave before his resurrection) Since they had run out of wine, Mary mentions it to her son, "They have no wine." It was a gentle hint. It would be similar to a parent saying to one of the children, "The dirty dishes are still on the table." Even though Jesus responds that it's not our problem, the host is the person who is responsible, Mary knew her son. She sensed as a mother could sense, that Jesus would not do nothing. "Now standing there were six stone water jars," John tells us, "each holding 15 to 25 gallons" 150 to 180 gallons altogether. They were special, used for Jewish religious purification rites, they were

big, and they were filled to the brim. From them came the best tasting wine served at the wedding.

This miracle of Jesus does not simply meet the physical needs of the thirsty guests. Just as we would expect in John, the miracle has a marvelous twist. It reaches to a deeper need, a more profound yearning. The wine is created in holy jars, “jars for the Jewish rites of purification” and it is created in abundance, a sign that God is doing sacred work in this man called Jesus. John says, “Here is your Epiphany, here is your manifestation of who Jesus is.” He ends this account with, “His disciples believed.” And this is the key to the whole story. The people, including you and me, are thirsty not just for wine but for God – thirsty for faith, thirsty for a living relationship with God.

But our theologian, John, is not finished with us yet. Just what is the sign here anyway? Is it the water, is it the wine, just what is it? “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.” Jn.2:10. Now is the time for the Messiah, now is the time for salvation, for as John tells us, it is here at Cana in Galilee that Jesus “revealed his glory.” Even though “His hour had not yet come” which is the hour of his death on the cross, the supreme moment of Jesus’ glorification, we are to recognize the true sign. John is telling us that this epiphany this manifestation of Jesus at Cana points to and is to focus us upon the true epiphany, the ultimate epiphany of Jesus – the glory of his cross. For it is in the glory of the cross that the old order, the Jewish purifications, is replaced by the new. This is what the changing of the water into wine symbolizes, the real, final epiphany, the cross of Christ. “You have kept the good wine until now.”

As we hear this wonderful story in St. John’s Gospel about the changing of the water into wine and learn the astounding lessons about Jesus, we are reminded of his deep, deep compassion and love of his Father’s creation and especially his people. We, too, are called to participate in changing the water of indifference, selfishness and lack of faith into the blood red wine of compassion, belief and love. A 17 year old girl in Georgia responded to the devastating tragedy in Haiti in this way. She said that maybe she couldn’t change others, but she certainly could change herself. And she added that she is going to have more concern for others. If we are to receive a message in regard to this recent disaster in Haiti, we need to hear God’s wonderful Word, and instead of the self-centered response that it must be God’s wrath and his punishment for a sinful world, we should listen to his Son, Jesus Christ, and see that we need to respond as he would with compassion, faith and love. Once a curious Bible student asked St. Jerome the great biblical scholar if the guests at Cana drank all the wine that Jesus had made. St. Jerome responded, “No, we are still drinking it.” **Amen.**

Pastor Barney