

Reflection for Sunday, January 16, 2022

Transformation

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given so God imparts to human hearts the blessed gift of heaven.

And the [gift] became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

May the peace of the Lord be always with you.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, we come today to worship you, confident as always that you are with us. You receive our prayers, our laments, and our joys. As we gather today, make us one in spirit and one in body as you yourself were embodied in the person of Jesus, in whose name we pray and worship. Amen.

The Galilee in which Jesus had grown up was relatively fertile country, at least in comparison with some of the neighboring regions. But taxation was oppressive, transportation difficult, and almost no one had discretionary income. Feasting and celebration took place only when there was a great occasion; one of the hallmark events in the life of a family was the wedding of a son or daughter. Very often a wedding festival would last a full week.

Well before the week was out, a miscalculation became evident. Not enough wine had been secured. Word of the mistake was passed to Mary, Jesus' mother, and she passed this news to Jesus. By the grace of God, the common water was changed into the uncommon; the ordinary was made extraordinary. Mary's intervention saved jobs; Jesus unmasked God's glory working in him.

Dr. Robert Dannels offers an evocative description of the symbolic meaning of wine for Latin American Christians: "Wine is a symbol of joy; lighting up a room with laughter and friendship. In Latin America they envision the kingdom ruled by Christ as a place filled with singing, dancing, and feasting. They believe the first responsibility is to allow God to turn the water of sadness, anxiety, stress, and emptiness into the wine of new life. As they begin the new year, they invite each person in the community to make a new start. But it is not enough to have your own water changed into wine. A second feature is that you must seek the same for others, to increase their station and joy of life. It means to have direct responsibility for the least, the lost, and the last of one's community. The point is to be ready at all times to give and serve what God has given us, to manifest God's glory by reaching out with the ordinary...to manifest God in your own givenness through everyday opportunities. I doubt that turning six jars of water into wine will be your given task. But it could mean turning your jar of peanut butter into sandwiches for the homeless."

Too often we hear the expression in our churches, "Some people do everything!" What if instead we flipped that expression around so that it became "everybody does something?" If we think of the jars as a symbol of our lives, with what will they be filled?

The truth is that all kinds of waters run through our lives: waters of birth, of tears, of refreshment, of cleansing, of healing, and of life itself. We are invited to ponder the ways water fills our jars: to comprehend the God who loves us *by name* long before we decide to trust or distrust that love; to seek to understand the graciousness of the God who forgives us completely *and* with complete understanding; to really grasp the demand of the God who proclaims that we are *all* sisters and brothers; to really hope in the God whose love always remains

undiscouraged; to really believe that God's eternal love has an *unbreakable hold upon us and our world*.

"We (Christians) believe that with all its pain and ambiguities, this is God's world, because of Jesus Christ, who, as John's Gospel tells us, is like a light shining in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it. His life, his teaching, his death, his resurrection, above all, his unconquerable love, are so overwhelmingly impressive that we confess that in him we have seen the glory of the Father, full of grace and truth. In him, something new entered the world, a life so compelling in its love and outreach to all that we accept him as the revelation of the deepest reality. It is in him that we learn what human life is about and what this world is about" (John Macquarrie).

May the light of Christ illumine the dark places throughout our world and in our own hearts.