

Sermon Preached January 17, 2010
Year C, Epiphany 2
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
North Andover, MA
The Rev. Stephanie Chase Wilson

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

The other day Duncan asked what was for dinner. I listed the menu which included broccoli. "Broccoli!" He exclaimed, "I'm not going to eat any broccoli!" I ignored him and served him a helping. He glared at me and ate it. Mothers are like that. We tell our kids what to do, tune out their objections, and move them forward to do what we told them. That's one of the funniest things going on in the gospel lesson today. Mary and Jesus are at a wedding in Cana, about 5 miles from Nazareth, when the hosts run out of wine. Mary leans over and tells Jesus to fix it. You can imagine she has some idea of his powers and she wants him to use them for this humble purpose. He basically says, "No way Mom!" He doesn't think it's the right time. But Mary completely ignores him, finds the servants, and tells them to do whatever Jesus says. You can imagine Jesus rolling his eyes and saying, "Moooooooooom!" And then, of course, he does what his mother tells him to do and changes water into wine.

The second funny thing going on in this story is when the wine is brought out to the chief steward and we get a little lesson in ancient Galilean etiquette! We discover that it is appropriate to use good wine to get your guests drunk, and then to save a buck by bringing out the cheap stuff when they are beyond being able to taste the difference! Sounds like their wedding planner wasn't on the ball. These vignettes teach us not only that the wedding host didn't have enough wine, but the stuff he did have was swill.

As most of you are probably aware, I have wedding on the brain these days. I recently became engaged to be married. Bill is the rector of Grace Church in New Bedford and we are looking forward to getting married this spring, hopefully including a reception where we don't run out of wine!

But the point of this gospel story isn't that Jesus enjoys being a winemaker, but rather that God in Christ is in the business of transformation. Not just transforming water into wine, but opening up new possibilities where at first there didn't seem to be any. I'm sure the host was certain the celebrations were over when the wine gave out, but Jesus can change the circumstances in a moment so that where once there was insufficiency, is now abundance.

600 or so years before the time of Christ, Israel was in trouble. They were conquered by their enemies, the Babylonians, and many of their people were taken into slavery. Jerusalem was overrun and its Temple destroyed. Israel suffered generations of hardship and loss. The people believed that God had abandoned them. But then God speaks to them through the prophet Isaiah, and says, “for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn... You 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.” God envisions Israel as a bride and he the bridegroom who rejoices in her. And as it turns out, over time the Israelite captives do return to their homeland and the land is restored. What was once a hopeless situation was transformed by God into a time of rejoicing, as one would find at a wedding.

How often do we find ourselves at the end of our rope? How often do we encounter scarcity? We are in pain and can’t imagine how things will ever change. That’s where Christ steps in. Through Christ we find transformation from hopelessness to abundance. Doors will open up that we could never have imagined.

For instance, for those of us who are divorced, how many of us have experienced moments of despair? Divorce is a sad and often bitter hurt. It is not part of God's hope for us, but sometimes our failures, and those of others, make it impossible to avoid. For me, my engagement to Bill is a testament to the power of God's transforming love. That over the course of several years Christ's love can transform a time of sadness into one of great joy.

Which points out something to beware of: that while Jesus is in the business of transformations, they don't always happen on our timetable. The wedding guests were fortunate to get their wine and transformation right away, that may or may not be the case for us. Sometimes it takes years for transformation to work out fully, but during that time of waiting, God stands with us to support us with love and courage. We are never alone.

This week we were all shocked to learn of the devastation by the earthquake to Haiti. The pictures and stories to come out of that country are heartbreaking! They are the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and have been suffering under tremendous poverty and corruption. Then they are hit with this earthquake, with between 1-2 hundred thousand dead and countless

injured and homeless. It is beyond imagining. If there was ever a time that people knew scarcity and hopelessness, it is the people of Haiti this week.

That's why it was so appalling when Pat Robertson made the statement he did, blaming the people of Haiti for their suffering. That God actually wanted them to suffer for their sins. Not only was it a heartless and cruel statement to the Haitian people, but it was an insult to God. God does not want us to suffer. Remember, Jesus is in the business of transforming love.

Jim Wallis, a prominent progressive Christian leader, [gave a wonderful response in which he said,] "As a Christian leader, I have had to spend too much of my time trying to overcome an image of Christianity that was created by the likes of Pat Robertson," he wrote. "When evil strikes, it's easy to ask, 'where is God?' The answer: God is suffering in the midst of the evil with those who are suffering."¹

In other words, God is with the people of Haiti and God is with you and me.

¹ <http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2010/01/15/politics/politicalhotsheet/entry6101136.shtml>

My deepest prayer is that God will use us and the people of Haiti to bring about Jesus' transforming love to that suffering land. It may not happen today or tomorrow, but that somehow this tragedy will be the impetus for the rebuilding of a new Haiti. One with hope and promise for its people. A country transformed from a place of scarcity to a place of abundance. I don't know how that will happen or when, but I do believe that the powerful message of Christ is that God desires all of us to celebrate at the wedding feast. To live abundant lives. God is not looking for ways to toss people out or shorten the joy, to cause any of us to feel hopeless, or send earthquakes to poor countries. Instead, God sent us Jesus to transform our hearts, our minds, and our lives from despair into hope, from brokenness into relationship, and from death into life.

Amen.