

MESSAGE - "Turning Water to Wine"

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A little over 10 years ago, Simon Sinek wrote a book called, "Begin With Why" getting leaders and organizations to focus on the root of why they are doing what they do instead of what they do or how they do something.

This book resounded in me, as I find myself a pretty practical person.

- I like items that are functional/serve a purpose. If I bring something into my house, it needs to be useful.
- I like to do things that are productive; have a tangible or visible result
- If things are going to change, it needs to be for a good reason; I'm not someone who likes change simply for the sake of change – it would need to have something work better or serve a greater purpose...

I am naturally someone who will ask, "why?" if the purpose isn't immediately obvious. I think I would have had a hard time being some of the people in today's story:

John 2:1-11

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴ "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

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There is much in this story to catch our attention and make us ponder:

- The detail of who is at this wedding....and the realization that Jesus and his disciples participated in everyday kinds of activities; they were a part of a community, etc.
- The drama of a wedding at which there is scarcity; worry for the groom and bride
- The interaction of Jesus and his mother....Mary's pointing out the problem to Jesus, Jesus' cryptic reply about this not "being his time", Mary ignoring him and moving things along, and Jesus going on ahead with his mother's wishes.
- The incredible amount of wine; going from scarcity to abundance; from no wine to anywhere from 120-180 gallons.
- And of course: the "how did that happen?" How can water become wine? Either trying the impossible of figuring out a mystery or trying to explain it away.

But what catches my attention is the behavior of the servants. Particularly, their lack of asking, "why?"

Now, I'm quite sure it is because it is not their place to ask, but simply to obey.

So perhaps the servants wondered within their hearts: "why?"

For they are told to do a couple of things that don't seem to make sense to the situation:

#### *Fill the purification jars*

The stone jars that Jesus tells the servants to fill are "the ones used for ceremonial washing". Jews were required to wash their hands and say a blessing before eating any meal that included bread. This was done with a two-handled cup, the person pouring twice over the right hand followed by twice on the left hand. This was done for ritual, rather than for pragmatic purposes....its not about personal hygiene, as everyone is required to perform the ritual even if hands are already clean.

In our story, it seems that the meal was over....the purification rituals had taken place...people had already ceremonially washed and therefore the stone jars were depleted. Everyone had already done the ritual, the people had been ceremonially cleansed, and the bread and meal had been eaten. So why would the stone jars need to be refilled?

I can imagine the servants wondering this.....

What do we need these jars refilled for?

*Draw some out and take it to the steward*

If filling the stone jars with water again seemed pointless, drawing some of the water out and taking it to the steward seemed to push the question, "why" even more.

Why would the steward want water from the purification jars?

What would that do?

The steward is frantic about the lack of wine and we're going to confound the situation by bringing him water from the purification jars?

But it is through their obedience and follow through that something happens.

The miracle, the first that Jesus did, happens through their obedience.

And that's something we need to remember as we live in our faith and do the work of the church. For it seems that Jesus tells us to do things that don't make sense.

- Jesus said, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"
- Turn the other cheek, give your coat along with your tunic to the one who wants to sue you, and go two miles instead of the one you are forced to go.
- Do not judge.
- Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you – do not worry."

"Why" Jesus? These teachings do not come natural to us.

Jesus might remind us that these are the steps that lead to development of the community of God. Going through the rituals isn't enough....we have to live out the faith. That these are the actions that shift our own hearts and minds and attitudes that help us to live fully with each other. That these are the actions that really do change the world. Living like this helps us to experience the presence of God in our hearts.

Similarly, in the life of our church, which is set in the midst of a truly divided and conflicted culture, we are asking the congregation to engage in holy conversations. And we have many reasons why *not* to do that.

"I've had those conversations and they didn't go well."

"Those people don't listen."

"I don't want to be judged for me thoughts."

But this story of Jesus turning water into wine reminds us that it is through faithfulness, by listening to what Jesus says, and following through with it, that the miracle happens; that change takes place; that what we need is fulfilled.

It happened again when there was just a little bit of bread and fish – but it fed a crowd as the disciples did what Jesus said, to start passing it out after Jesus blessed it.

And it happens again and again when we live out what Jesus instructs.

In our days...

Even when don't completely understand why....

As we feed the hungry, as we engage in healthy conversation, as we give and do not count the cost....

Jesus keeps turning water into wine.

And why?

It must be out of an unfathomable love for us.

#### OFFERING ANNOUNCEMENT

Why church? When there are so many other places we can make a gift.

Why church?

I give to church because this is the story that changes the course of history and this story needs to be preserved and shared.

Why give to church? Because these are the teachings from God through Jesus that create community, bring healing, and help us live in wholeness with God and one another.

Why give to church? Because I believe the church testifies to the reality and love and grace of God through the ministry and mission of the church.

Claim your "why" and make your offering to the ministry of First Church online, through the mail, or in the offering boxes in the entryway.