

Revealing God's Glory

Isaiah 62:1-5

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11

Psalms 36:5-10

I understand that we are living in the middle of wine country. Do we have wine lovers among us? Don't raise your hands, but have any of you ever drank half a bottle of wine in one sitting? How about a whole bottle? Two bottles?

I did a little research, because I find the story in our gospel reading to be fascinating, and this is what I learned. Weddings and wine in first century Cana were different than today, but for the sake of curiosity it's fun to speculate. Today's wedding industry is such a big deal, there are calculators to measure these things. A typical wedding guest will consume up to 3 glasses of wine in the first hour. Women begin getting tipsy after the second glass.

We don't know many people were at this wedding in Cana. We do know that weddings at this time typically lasted a week. The text specifies this was the third day, so they are probably halfway through their celebration. At a modern wedding, 100 people will generally consume 5 gallons of wine in an hour. According to the math given in this text, Jesus made 180 gallons of wine. No matter how many people were there or how long the party lasted, they would never make it through that amount of wine. And that is the thing that is always so wild to me about this story. It is just SO much wine!

What is equally surprising about Jesus' first miracle is that it was in no way religious. It wasn't performed in a temple. It did not serve, in any traditional way, to worship God. It didn't heal anyone, so it wasn't even performed to uphold some moral imperative. If anything, it's a morally questionable act because it provided intoxicants for people who

were already inebriated. So, what does the revelation of God's glory have to do with this crazy story?

Today our texts show a sharp contrast between the world as it is without God's visible presence and the world as it is when God's presence is made manifest. When Jesus revealed the glory of God through this miracle, it wasn't like Jesus appeared out of thin air. He had been at the wedding. His presence, his power, and his glory had been there all along. The people just hadn't been able to see it. God, through Christ, had not been understood until the moment when Jesus chose to REVEAL God's glory.

Glory is a strange concept and one we don't always grasp very well. In Scripture it's described as brightness or splendor. In most cases it's linked with God's throne room, magnificent temples, or Heaven. But Biblically, God's glory is not located somewhere stationary in a far-off realm. God's glory exists, it IS, and humans on earth can choose to participate in making it seen or in hiding it from view. Jesus existed with these people, but even he had to ACT for God's glory to be revealed. The fact that Jesus acted so extravagantly by making SO much wine is striking because it makes such an extraordinary statement about the immensity and availability of God's glory.

What's interesting about this miracle is the contrast in its message. Jesus makes a shocking amount of wine, way beyond what was reasonable, but he places it in six stone jars. The Hebrew people understood seven as the number of perfection, so the fact that he used six jars was highlighting something incomplete or imperfect. Immediately after the wine was made, the first thing Jesus did was have the servant take it to the steward who then took it to the bridegroom. It's as if Jesus was saying that HIS part in the miracle was incomplete until the lowest servant had participated in making God's glory known.

While Jesus was on earth, he lived to make God's glory known. But after Jesus ascended, he left the Holy Spirit with us so that we would be equipped to continue the work of revealing God's glory. In our reading from 1 Corinthians, Paul tells us that each person is given some specific way of making God's glory visible on earth. He says, "The Spirit allots to each one individually". Paul lists a bunch of ways he had seen God's glory revealed through people. It's as if Paul is saying that God's glory exists here, with us, but we have to participate with the Spirit by performing from our gifts FOR God's glory to be revealed. And Paul doesn't leave anyone out. He says that EACH one has an ability to manifest God's Spirit. Every person has been entrusted with a unique way of revealing God's glory in this world. Jesus was filled with the Spirit of God, and even he had to choose to act so that others could see God's glory. We have to act too. For us, those actions start from faith.

We are blessed beyond measure to live after Jesus, filled with the presence of God's spirit. Our Hebrew Bible authors wrote in expectation of our reality. Isaiah's text was written for the Hebrews, returning from exile to a land devastated by their enemies. He proclaimed God's glory to a land that looked far from glorious. Their revelation of God's glory was an act of faith in reminding themselves of the promises of God when everything their eyes saw reminded them only of defeat and loss. And while today's Psalm is replete with praise for God's goodness, our reading begins at verse 5. Verses 1-4 highlight the workings of evil and the threats they pose. The Psalmist illustrates the power of faith to believe in the light even when the light cannot be seen...to use praise as a way to pull back the curtain of evil and show the powerful presence of God's light that exists, so that it can be seen.

When I think of Mary in today's gospel account, I wonder what it would have been like to live with Jesus for all those years before his divinity was revealed. We don't know if he performed private miracles that were never recorded. We just know that Mary's exposure to Jesus, her proximity to God through Christ, was clear enough that her faith in him made

this miracle possible. She didn't ask him if he could do it. She knew he could. She didn't ask him if he wanted to help, she knew he did. Somehow, she was positioned in such a way to know there was a need, when others seemed oblivious or unconcerned. And she acted. If she hadn't, that wedding party would have ended in disgrace. If the servant hadn't taken the wine to the steward, if the steward hadn't taken the wine to the groom, God's glory wouldn't have been revealed that day. God was there in Jesus, but his glory waited for human participation before it was unveiled.

Paul tells us that our gifts from the Spirit exist for the common good. They aren't for us. Our abilities have been given to us so that others can see God through them. When Mary told Jesus about the need she saw, Jesus hesitated. Even he knew there was a cost involved in this work of manifesting God's glory. For Jesus, this act began the countdown until his murder. Our willingness to step out in faith and reveal God's glory through our actions, will also require risk. Participating in the revelation of God requires that we choose to make those sacrifices and take those risks. At the same time, when Jesus decided to act, the Spirit working through him transformed 180 gallons of water into wine. It makes me wonder what amazing, miraculous, works of God we might partake in if we are willing to take risks, starting with the risk of belief.

Sometimes we know exactly what God is inviting us into. We know the opportunity in front of us and we know our capacity. Other times we need people to help us know. Even Jesus needed Mary to point out the need to him. Sometimes our participation in revealing God to the world is helping others know what their gifts are and how they might be used because sometimes we can't see ourselves as clearly as others see us.

Our participation with God in the work Jesus started may be to encourage others ... and it may be to take a risky step of faith ourselves. Whatever it is, may we be a people willing to trust God enough to risk, and pull back the veil so God's glory can be seen on this earth.