

## Transformation Brings Joy

John 2:1-11

*For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch.*

Good morning. Today's theme -- Transformation Brings Joy -- calls us to look beyond the matter of Jesus turning water into wine. That minor miracle of transformation does indeed bring joy to the wedding party. For, as the rabbis said: Without wine there is no joy.

But scripture always comes at us on at least two levels. And today is no different. Yes, the gospel speaks of joy, the immediate joy that brings laughter and a smile; and it also speaks of the deep, abiding joy found in Jesus Christ, a joy that thrives despite the highs and lows of life. Two forms of joy, each brought about by transformation.

But first, let's go to Cana. Everybody is there. Jesus and his friends, his mother and the rest of the family. Folks from far and near have turned out to celebrate. There's dancing and singing. Good food and good wine. There is joy. My own wedding was like this one, only my reception lasted one evening. This one is going to go on all week. But soon there is trouble. The wine runs out. Remember what the rabbis said: Without wine there is no joy.

You can imagine the families of the bride and groom scrambling for a solution. Without wine the celebration will collapse. A sacred rule of hospitality will be broken, and the accompanying embarrassment and humiliation will be long-remembered.

Somehow word gets to Mary. Maybe she has noticed the commotion and concern. She turns to her son: "They have no wine," she says. He responds with what sounds like a rebuff. His sacred hour of glorification in Jerusalem is years away. But she knows her boy. She has seen his compassion and sympathy at work back home in Nazareth. She knows he will act. And his action is one of the beauties of this story.

To save a humble, young couple's reputation the Son of God, the Word made flesh, quietly turns perhaps 180 gallons of water into wine that is so good, the chief steward can't believe what he's tasting. He thinks this is the good win that should have been served first. That they've already had the good wine tells you the wine Jesus has brought to the table is a connoisseurs' dream.

So, the party continued. A work of transformation brought joy. But, remember, there is that other type of joy not based on happiness, but on a spiritual disposition, a way of being in the world that is a grace-filled gift from God.

I had a parishioner who was the living embodiment of this joy. Every day she would greet the dawn with an exuberant shout: "Good morning, Lord!" This she said was better than waking up and saying: "Good Lord, it's morning."

Every morning, regardless of the previous day's trials, or the known and unknown challenges she'd meet in the coming hours, her heart sang out: "Good morning, Lord!"

Now, she had every right to be miserable, bed-ridden as she was, her lower body twisted and useless from arthritis. Down the hall from her, a man in the maddening grip of Alzheimer's screamed and

shouted night and day. On the other side of the curtain in her shared room, patients came and went. Some to their homes. Some to their graves. Yet she soldiered on in this rehab hospital, year after year, clinging fiercely to the joy of life in Jesus Christ, her song a defiant beam of light piercing the darkness of that soul-wearying place.

Her joy humbled me. From her bed she celebrated what God had done and was continuing to do in the great story of salvation. Oh, there were tears, times I visited when her spirit-lamp burned low. But the joy helped her overcome the despair.

This joy has sustained Christians for thousands of years. It gave a song to Paul and Silas as they sat in chains in the jail in Philippi. It lifted the voices of the martyrs on their way into the Roman arena. It strengthened John Lewis on his Freedom Ride, and Martin Luther King, Jr. when he and others tried to march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on Bloody Sunday. All of the singing in the face of what the world saw as defeat, but what they knew was the victory of God.

I don't know all the songs they sang. Some were hymns. Some were sorrow songs. Some were songs of defiance: *Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round, turn me 'round, turn me 'round. Ain't gonna let nobody turn me' round. I'm gonna keep on walking, keep on talking, Walking up the king's highway.*"

These were people who had been transformed. And transformation brings joy, just as the psalmist says: "You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures for evermore."

In your presence there is fullness of joy.

I think of those joy-filled saints and I hear St. Paul writing from a prison cell to his friends in Philippi: "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you."

I feel his words ringing inside of me, inspiring me, and so I say: Brothers and sisters I do not consider myself to have attained the fullness of joy. But this one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on, ever onward, thanking God for all of you and for those saints I have met along the way; the crippled parishioner who has gone on to glory and who is probably still singing in her eternal day: Good morning, Lord!

And there is that aged parishioner who wants her funeral to be filled with songs of joy and praise. Sing me no sad songs, she says. Rejoice, for God has done great things for me. She is already looking forward to that time beyond time when she shall see God and be fully known, while we who are left behind celebrate her life, not sorrowing as those who have no hope, but rejoicing in the presence of God revealed through Jesus Christ.

Yes, I thank God for those saints. As the old song goes: I want to be in that number when those saints go marching in. I want to be in that state of spiritual transformation symbolized in today's gospel, that grace-infused joy that lifts us up, even when we are down, that gives us strength to keep on walking, to keep on praising so that even at the grave our song shall be, Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God!

The Rev. M. Dion Thompson, delivered on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2019, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany.

