

2ND EPIPHANY – “The Miracle of Change”
January 18, 2004 – Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close

The season of Epiphany begins to unfold the story of Jesus. Each week, we hear about something else that Jesus has said or done. Each week it is revealed to us just who this person is from God. Today, we hear the familiar story of Jesus' first miracle. It is the story of his changing water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. The story has overtones of the Holy Eucharist. Many people say it's Episcopalians' favorite miracle! But what is the deeper meaning of the story? What are we to learn about ourselves from this reading today?

My New Testament professor at Virginia Seminary, Dr. Reginald Fuller says that this Gospel story points out that Jesus is the agent of change. He says that the Jewish rites of purification, represented by the stone water jars, remind us of the practices of the people to become clean before God. In Jesus, the purification rites are changed. It is his death on the cross that makes us able to stand before God. Jesus takes the everyday symbols and practices of the people and transforms them. He changes them and points us in a new and life-giving direction.

When we think about Jesus being an agent of change, it evokes for us the idea of renewal. We need to be renewed, both in our personal lives and even in the Church. It is Jesus who brings about this change. Why is it, if we believe in Jesus, that we Christians are so afraid of change? Our fear often becomes violent and loud opposition! There's a joke about how many Episcopalians it takes to change a light bulb. One version says, we don't change light bulbs ... because we don't like change!

Many of you have heard this fear or opposition around our Church. It often comes out like this: “We've never done it that way.” “The Church should not change.” “We're unchanging.” This attitude of resistance and opposition is wrong and dangerous. It's the same attitude Jesus encountered in the Pharisees. Do you remember who they are in the Bible? The Pharisees are the religious people of Jesus' day. It is they with whom he argues so much. It is the Pharisees who will reject Jesus' message. They are the ones who will plot and arrange for Jesus' death. We are the Pharisees.

When I studied with Rabbi Friedman, we looked at systems. Family, school and work systems all function in remarkably the same way. Humans desire “homeostasis.” That's the longing for things to remain as they are right now. Change disrupts our systems. When it happens, one of our first reactions is to return to the way things were. We want to deal with the known and are afraid of the unknown. The reality is that Jesus is all about CHANGE!

Jesus brings change and with it comes abundance, feasting, joy and new life! The evangelist John tells us much with the story of Jesus at the wedding feast. The symbolism of weddings is all about change! Just think about it. Think about your wedding or the wedding of your children. A couple gets married and leaves their parents to become adults. Some of us are very ready for them to leave! Others are not. But it is a change nonetheless. A couple leaves their parents' homes. They create a new home in a new location. Some of us are very ready for this! It is change. Weddings mark tremendous change in our lives. Our liturgies speak about change ... Baptism,

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Confirmation, Matrimony and Burial speaks about the rhythm of change that occurs in our lives.

Life is about change. We go from infancy to school, from school to work, from work to retirement. It is constant change. We even expect changes to happen! It's natural. It's the way God made us! Jesus came into the world not to reinforce the sameness or the ways that already existed. Jesus came to change us and the world! Jesus brought the change of new life, a new relationship with God, a new relationship with each other, and a new community we call the Church.

Jesus is about change that is life-giving! He does not call us to sameness. We are not called to be static. There is a problem when we don't change. Routine often becomes a habit. Habits too easily become stagnation. Where there is no change in nature, there is no growth. Where there is no growth in nature, there is death. Change is necessary for life!

Jesus comes and says to us it is time for a change. The change is marked in two places. First, there are the outer changes in our actions. Second, and more importantly, there are the inner changes in our attitudes and beliefs. Change is about seeking new life. Jesus says to us today that it is time to change ourselves and the world.

The miracle at Cana is the first sign of change in the Gospel story. It will culminate with the greatest sign in Jesus' life ... the crucifixion and resurrection. The change that Jesus brings is dynamic! We are changed from being lost and forsaken to being saved! Those who refuse to change will die ... be they people or a Church. It's not enough to say, "We'll never die!" That's called denial.

Look at how change comes about in the Gospel story today. Jesus speaks and it happens. There is power in his words. An ordinary event becomes extraordinary. Jesus takes the wedding feast and points us towards greater things to come. The potential disaster of running out of wine is averted. The day is saved, Jesus saves us!

Jesus has forever changed the world. It is time for us to learn to explore and change that we too might experience new life. It's time for us to stop complaining about the changes and learn like the Psalmist to sing a new song! Jesus promises that with change comes new life. This is especially true if we are centered in Jesus Christ. Great things happen when we open our spirit. New revelation, new understanding, and new life are made abundantly available to us!

Great things can happen ... when we are willing to embrace change. If we are to embrace Jesus, then we must accept him as an agent of change. We are invited to be part of the miracle of change that Jesus brings. There are miracles out there waiting for us. The best is yet to come. All we have to do is change ...