

GIFTEDNESS

January 14, 2007

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

There are a couple of ways to view the miracles of Jesus, aside from the obvious choice of *belief* or *disbelief*. One is the *sensory* way, the literal way. A great windstorm whips up waves that begin to swamp the disciples' boat one stormy night on the Sea of Galilee. More than a little panic-stricken, the disciples rouse Jesus, who is asleep on a cushion in the stern.

Before Jesus rubs the sleep out of his eyes, he rebukes the wind, and then tells the sea to calm down. After the winds cease, and the sea turns to glass, Jesus chides the disciples for their fear, or *their little faith*. The story ends with the disciples breathless with awe at the mighty act, and speculating among themselves as to who Jesus could be for accomplishing such a mighty work (Mk. 4:35-41).

From the vantage point of the *sensory*, what you read is what you get. Jesus did this and the disciples did that. Period. But there is another way to view the

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miraculous event, to see it as a *sign*. To view what happened in the miracle, not only from the point of view of the literal, but also from the point of view of the symbolic or figurative. Applied to the miracle of the stilling of the storm, it is clear that Jesus not only saved his close friends and himself from drowning that stormy night on the lake but He also, through this mighty act, displayed his *messianic lordship over nature*. No ordinary mortal could do this, only God's Son, the Beloved.

The same methods can be applied to the miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. *On the third day*, John wrote, Jesus and his disciples arrive at a wedding to which they have been invited. On the literal level, everyone can *see* the event. The receiving line extends out the door of the bride's home. The young couple receives their arriving guests, who make sure to sign the book as they enter.

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The parents of the groom and the bride hug all their relatives and guests. The local rabbi, who stayed back at the synagogue to sign the register and make sure the marriage contract was correct, is the last to arrive. Many stop and tell him what a beautiful service it was.

The local caterer hovers over the servers to make sure that the trays of finger food and sliced fillet and the fruit plates are all full. Of particular concern to the caterer is that the wine flows freely and *fully*. Abundant moments call for abundance, the caterer tells the kitchen staff. The whole wedding party, including Jesus and his disciples are enjoying themselves, *until* the unthinkable happens, a host's worst nightmare, Martha Stewart's biggest *No-No*; a successful caterer's swan song. The wine *gives out*.

But Mary springs into action and calls on Jesus *to take care of the wine*. And so Jesus, not without some resistance on his part, proceeds to save the wedding,

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maybe even the marriage, by turning six stone jars full of water into enough wine to turn the head of any vineyard owner.

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him (Jn. 2:11). It means that Jesus not only saved a party, he also proclaimed a Gospel that day in Cana. More than water was turned into wine. An old mode of being gave way to a new mode of being. The Gospel of *new wine* was disclosed, and with this disclosure, certain truths became clear.

Upon inviting Jesus into our midst, the more miraculous life becomes. We'll experience the giftedness of the Holy Spirit, the effects of which Paul writes of in great detail in the Epistle reading for today (1 Cor. 12:1-11). This giftedness is the active fermentation of the *new wine* in the life of the believer *and* the believing community.

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The more *jar-like* we become, the more the *New Wine* takes hold. The more centered in prayer we are, the more disciplined in worship and service we are then the more available we are to be a vessel of the Spirit's power. To be transformed into the new wine of the Kingdom of God is to experience more deeply the Gospel Jesus brings. We see the strange and wonderful ways Gospel *giftedness* happens. We witness the abundance of God poured out of ourselves for the sake of others. Receptivity leads to release.

The more we are involved with the world, and in the world, the better the *new wine becomes*. Less and less do we desire to be the old wine that means living somebody else's life. Less and less do we desire to be *conformed to this world*, to be caught up in a deadly spirit of *sameness*. We are guided and we gravitate toward authenticity. We bear fruit, fresh fruit, often that we never imagined we would bear on our own. In

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living the story of the miracle at Cana in Galilee *we* unite with Jesus and by the Spirit of God, *we too* can and should become *New Wine* poured out for a world that continually needs a fresh supply.

AMEN.