

JESUS AND WATER: SURVIVING THE SUMMER HEAT

Water Into Wine

John 2:1-11

Water into wine! It would be my guess that after Jesus turned the water into wine that he was on every wedding and party guest list in town. Imagine the money that the hosts can save with Jesus around! “*Here’s some water Jesus; do your thing!*”

The story is told of the minister who was driving home after attending a late show. To his dismay he sees lights flashing behind him—he is being pulled over for speeding. Standing at the door of his car the trooper smells wine and sees an empty bottle on the floor. He says to the minister, “*Sir, have you been drinking?*” The minister replies, “*Only water.*” “*Then why do I smell wine,*” responds the trooper. The minister then looks down at the bottle and in a voice of utter amazement says to the officer, “*Good Lord, he’s done it again!*”¹

Water into wine. What is the meaning of this rather popular Jesus story? So Jesus can turn water into wine—what spiritual value or lesson is found in that? Some will respond—but it is a miracle! In fact, John calls it a sign—“*the first of Jesus signs.*” A sign of what? What is it about this event, this miracle, this turning water into wine, that leads the disciples to believe in Jesus? Are they awed by the miracle or by the man? Will they follow just anyone who can perform a few good tricks?

Helmut Koester, a New Testament professor and scholar, writes, “*...the miracles of Jesus are more than miracles, they are epiphanies.*”² An epiphany is an awakening, it is an ‘aha’ moment, it is a time of ‘getting it.’ An epiphany can lead to transformation—to a change of how one thinks, understands, and believes. “*Aha! Now I see!*”

Friends, the challenge before us today is to look at this water event in Jesus’ life and come away with an epiphany—with ‘getting it’! If all we see is Jesus performing a miracle—water into wine—but we miss how it spoke to his disciples and how it can speak to us, if we miss the epiphany, the ‘aha’ that can lead to transformation and to new possibilities, then the miracle means nothing!

The wedding reception is in full swing. It is a time to celebrate. Everyone is having a good time—including Jesus. Then a near tragedy happens—the wine runs out! Jesus’ mother informs him of the situation. He says to her, “*What business is it of ours.*” Then, as if she did not hear Jesus, she tells the servants at the reception to do whatever he tells them.

Jesus instructs the servants to fill with water the six jars that are usually reserved for the rite of purification. Each jar will hold twenty to thirty gallons. The servants fill the jars to the top—there is no more room. One more drop and the jars will overflow. Then, Jesus instructs the servants to draw out some of the water and to take it to the chief servant so that he can taste it. Lo and behold when he does taste it he declares that it is the best of wine. It is even better than what has already been served. “*...And the disciples believed in Jesus.*”

The epiphany, the time of ‘getting it,’ begins with the six jars that are normally reserved for the rite of purification. It was a part of the ritual custom that water would be poured over

everyone's hands before eating a meal as a sign of spiritual cleansing. Jesus transforms the purpose of the jars. They now hold not a liquid for the outer body but rather a liquid for the inner body. True spiritual cleansing begins on the inside. We can wash the outside all that we want but until we begin an inner cleansing, an inner transformation, the outside change is only pretense. **“Aha!”**

Six thirty gallon jars filled to the rim with water equals 180 gallons of wine! Do you really think they needed 180 gallons of wine? No they did not. This is a miracle of extravagance. It is a miracle of abundance. It is an epiphany of what is possible when one begins that inner cleansing, that inner transformation. **“Aha!”**

This reminds me of another Jesus story that John records in chapter six—another miracle. There are over 5000 people to feed with only five loaves and two fish. By the end of the story—after the miracle—everyone has eaten and there are enough loaves leftover to fill twelve baskets. Abundance! Extravagance!

Wine and loaves in abundant extravagance! Wine and loaves in abundant extravagance! **(Walk to the communion table and uncover the elements and hold up the cup and the bread)** Wine and loaves in abundant extravagance! It is John that records Jesus as saying, *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this, than when one lays down their life for their friends. You are my friends.”*³ Abundance! Extravagance! **“Aha!”**

“...And the disciples believed in Jesus.”

On the day that the water became wine Jesus was transformed in the eyes of the disciples from just another teacher, an invited guest, to one who was offering an inner cleansing that promised the hope of abundance and extravagance. That day the disciples began a journey of their own inner transformation, a transformation that would lead them to become more than they ever had dreamed possible. That day they opened themselves up to experience the extravagant love of God.

Water into wine into blood. Jesus said, *“There is no greater love than when one lays down their life for their friends. You are my friends!”* **“Aha!”**

¹ Smith, Kevin M., A sermon—Transforming Wine, delivered at North-Prospect United Church of Christ, Cambridge, Massachusetts, January 18, 2004.

² Koester, Helmut, Ancient Christian Gospels, page 205.

³ John 15:12-14a