

Water in the Hands of Jesus
John 2:1-11
Baptism of the Lord Sunday

Water is as common as anything on our planet, and especially these days our lives are full to the brim! This winter it just seems to keep snowing. On Friday morning it snowed again, much to everyone's surprise a couple of inches. Then it rained, and yesterday it rained and rained and got warmer and warmer. And all the ice that has accumulated in the past few weeks began melting with the snow and combining with the water to create ponds in people's driveways and waterfalls down the cliffs. If you drive along 29, or over in Upper Black Eddy, roll your window down and you can hear the water rushing to the river. We drink water, and cook with water, and bathe in water, and clean with water, try to keep water flowing in our pipes, and off our basement floors, running in rivers, and not through our ceilings. Water is all around us, pervasive in our lives. And so ordinary, so commonplace, we hardly think about it until it's a problem. The poor citizens of southern West Virginia, 300,000, are told this weekend they cannot use their water until a chemical contamination is cleared up. One man said he was in the bath when his wife called, "Get out of the tub!" Another lady was having her hair washed when the news came on the TV – she said she thought her hair was going to fall out. And another man said what everyone must be feeling – "you don't know how much you need water until you don't have it."

Water is as common as anything on our planet. But the other truth is, water in the hands of Jesus becomes a vessel of the glory of God. John 2 records the story of the wedding at Cana, a small town about 9 miles away from Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. It was the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, he had just gathered a small group of new friends and disciples around him, and they went to a wedding. It could have been a family wedding – Jesus' mother Mary was there. At some point as the party was rolling along, the wine gave out. Now if that happened today, a few of the groomsmen would quietly get in their car and go get more – I've seen it happen. But there were no stores open in Cana that day, and it was a major embarrassment that the wine had run out. Mary had an idea – Jesus could do something about it. So she said to him, "They have no wine." There was no question in that, but probably a tone of voice and a look that said, "You need to do something about this!" Jesus responded, with great respect, "Woman (a term of solemn address in that culture), what concern is that to me? My hour has not yet come." In other words, it's not time for me to reveal that who I am by working miracles. But Mary would not take no for an answer; she said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." She put the Lord on the spot. So Jesus pointed to six large jars that were sitting there for ritual washing rites, they would hold about 30 or 40 gallons, about the size of a large trash can, six of them. He pointed and said, fill these water. They filled them to the brim, and he said now draw it out and take it to the chief steward. The chief steward tasted the water, that had now become wine, and it was the best he had ever tasted. 200 gallons of the best wine he had ever tasted.

John concludes the story, saying, "Jesus did this . . . and revealed his glory." Glory is majesty and power; it is divinity, and holiness, and goodness, and beauty that radiates outward and leaves an impression on all who sense it. When Jesus revealed his glory, he revealed to those around him that they were in the presence of God. Not simply Joseph's son from Nazareth, but the son of God. When a person is in the presence of glory, it makes a deep impression, it calls out worship, and praise, and respect. That's why when Jesus performed this sign that revealed his glory, John says that his disciples "believed in him." When you are in the presence of glory, it calls from you a response of faith.

In the hands of Jesus, ordinary water became of sign of his glory – and it still does. Today is Baptism of the Lord Sunday, the day on which we remember the baptism of Jesus, and remember our own baptisms. The church baptizes with ordinary water – there is no special water poured into the font. When you were baptized the water came from the tap. When we baptize here, we go into the kitchen and turn on the faucet and fill the bowl with water. The same water we use for drinking and cleaning – ordinary water. But in the hand of Jesus, this ordinary water becomes extraordinary – it becomes a sign of his majesty and power, his goodness and beauty and truth. With this ordinary water, God bestows his glory on ordinary people and by his power makes them extraordinary. With this ordinary water, we become children of God, beloved in his sight. When Jesus was baptized, a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased.” When we are baptized, because of Jesus, those same words are said over us. You are God’s son, you are God’s daughter – in you God is well pleased. You are touched with God’s glory, through this ordinary water.

When you are a baby, or even a child, you don’t grasp the significance of this moment, but when you become an adult, it takes on a whole new meaning. When you realize that your life is touched with the glory of God, the questions and challenges of life take a different shape. The basic question, “Who am I?” – the question you ask as you stare at the person in the mirror -- finds its deepest answer in the waters of baptism: you are God’s child. The nagging question “What is my purpose – what am I supposed to be doing in this life?” The waters of baptism whisper the deeper answer: purpose of your life is to reflect the glory of God that is bestowed on you. What is the life you are destined to live? What are you born to do? Beyond achieving and succeeding in your goals, beyond spending and saving and acquiring – what are you born to do?

You are touched with God’s glory, and your purpose is to reflect God’s glory. That may happen in a career, where the work you do is a reflection God’s glory and presence within you; it may happen in creating a work of art, in sculpture or painting, as you lose track of time and feel that the inspiration you are expressing is not entirely your own; it may happen in a friendship, where you offer to another person the love and companionship of God; it may happen as a parent, as you make an impression of God’s unconditional love on a young heart. You may reflect God’s glory in many ways, when you realize that your life and your life’s purpose is larger and deeper and wider than yourself. You have been touched with Glory, touched by God.

In the hands of Jesus, ordinary water becomes a vessel for the glory of God. It is the power of God to claim you as his child, and hold you forever. Amen.

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