

Epiphany 2 The Wedding at Cana – A stained glass window

Madeleine L'Engle, noted Episcopalian writer of books for children and Christian pilgrims of all ages, loved to say that she takes the Bible far too seriously to take it literally.

Today's story of the wedding at Cana is a perfect example of what she means. The historical event is not what is important. What it tells us of Jesus can make a great deal of difference to our lives.

The Gospel of John, many believe, was written originally for a group of late first century Jewish-Christians who were concealing their faith in Jesus because of the threats of persecution if they were discovered.

John wrote in such a way to encourage them to decide to take the risk and follow Jesus openly in their lives. He tells the story of Jesus in a way that puts clear choices before the believer, then and now: Will you choose light or darkness. Life or death. The story of the wedding at Cana is, in a few short verses, the whole Christian story.

David Buttrick wrote once that the Gospel of “John is not a history book bristling with hard factual detail; it is more like a misty cathedral in which, surrounded by beckoning symbols, a ‘spiritual community’ finds meaning.”

So I invite you to enter such a misty cathedral, and look at the symbols in this well loved story and see if we can find meaning for our spiritual community.

Let’s design a stained glass window to hold our symbols and tell the story of the wedding feast where the wine runs out. There are four panels in this window. There are four panels in the window.

In the first panel there is simply an empty wine carafe.

It represents the simple statement of Mary: “They have no wine.”

Emptiness. For first century followers, fear had taken from them the deep sense of joy and purpose they felt when they had first followed the Way of Jesus. They were truly feeling empty.

We recognize that feeling. We have felt it at various times in our lives.

Times when we might describe ourselves as an empty wine carafe, Our job, our financial situation, our family, health, relationships. Or might it be a spiritual emptiness, dryness. God used to seem so close to us, now we feel given out. Spent.

We move now to the second panel. There we see six large empty water jugs.

Six is an incomplete number in biblical reckoning of things. Seven is complete. Here there are six. Not quite right.

The jars are to hold water for the Jewish rites of purification. For the first century Jewish-Christians they represent the old ways they have used to “get right with God.” And as they think about these old ways, they recall that no matter how hard they tried, they never felt they had gotten it right. Never quite felt filled.

This second panel symbolizes all the ways we try over and over to get the carafes of our lives filled again. Bookstores and gurus of all kinds

make us promises that if you just do this or that, life will be full, our problems will be solved.

The Christian faith is not a theory it is about living. It's about what happens when you feel like the party has just started and the wine is all gone. It's about where we turn when all the false promises of easy fixes and easy answers have been tried and failed.

So we come to the third and fourth panels of our window ... here we find the symbols of what Christians believe to be God's response to us our empty lives.

In the third panel, we see Mary, Jesus mother, directing that whatever Jesus asks be done: fill the jars with water.

In John understanding of faith, **DOING WHAT IS ASKED IS THE FIRST STEP.**

What might that mean in your life or in the life of Bruton Parish Church? What are you being asked to do? What are you willing to do? How is life unfolding? Where are the signs of new life in the Spirit? Doing often comes before understanding.

We are often stuck at the level of the second panel. We keep on doing what we have always done, maybe this time there will be a different result. It doesn't happen, but we are so resistant to change that we are stuck there.

Often this past year I have heard members of Bruton talk about how much they wish we had more younger members. A fair enough desire and dream, but what might we have to do for that to happen?

At a gathering this week of interim clergy and transition consultants the speaker posed this question to consider as we think about the future:

What will I need to lay aside or leave behind to be open to new gifts of God's grace?

This is the heart of John's gospel. The time of decisionWill it be light or darkness, life or death ... the invitation comes right here between panel two and three.

“Do whatever he tells you.”

The final panel shows the cross, and the jugs of water turned to very good wine. This is not two buck chuck. The good wine is abundant.

When Jesus speaks of HIS HOUR in John's gospel, he means the hour of his passion, the cross. What Jesus accomplishes on the cross is the old order being replaced by the new order. This is his hour. This fourth panel represents that hour. The overflowing jugs of wine point to the abundant life that comes from God. I have come that you might have life, and have it abundantly, Jesus says later in the Gospel. This panel is a picture of what we pray: thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven ... and it is a world into which we sometimes catch glimpses, and sometimes experience in this life.

One final question: Where would you put yourself in those four panels. I believe most of us could easily identify times we have spent in each.

Empty

Still trying the same ways with little fulfillment

Trying to do what you believe you are being asked to do

Full of an abundant joyful life

The life of the disciple is to be as firmly planted in panel three as is possible. Seeking to do what Christ asks. Lord, have mercy.