

This year our gospel readings are primarily from Luke, but this morning it is from John. In the lectionary design, the gospel of John is sprinkled throughout the three-year cycle. And I love John, it is so much different than the other gospels. The ancient symbol for John is the eagle. I like to think the gospel of John soars, it sees a big picture; it contains many layers of meaning.

Our gospel lesson today is a great example. It's a wonderful story, Jesus turning water into wine... It's an epiphany text because it reveals the identity of Jesus. The Gospel of John calls this a sign. In fact, this is the first sign. And consistent throughout the entire gospel, Jesus performs many miracles, and John consistently calls them all signs.

I like the word "sign." A sign points to something else, something greater or more eternal. Jesus transformed water into wine, and in so doing Jesus transformed scarcity into abundance, brokenness into forgiveness... Do you see what I'm trying to say? Signs point us to a bigger truth...

This story is packed with symbolism. This is a week-long wedding celebration, and this sign happens on the third day-- what else happens on the third day? Of course, resurrection! And of course, the wine is what we use for communion; "the Blood of Christ Shed for You."

We have a wedding celebration; a wedding is suggestive of a basic covenantal relationship between a bride and a groom. Biblical writers use this metaphor often to describe the relationship between God and His people.

We also have the intriguing element of Mary, or as the gospel of John refers to her, "the mother of Jesus." She makes two appearances-- here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and again—at the foot of the cross. In effect she book-ends Jesus ministry; she connects two signs – Jesus turning scarcity into abundance, and death into life.

As I've focused on this story, the thing that catches my attention is the six stone water

jars for the Jewish rites of purification, they are filled with water which is transformed into wine.

The symbolism here is incredible. These jars were used for ritualistic washing practices, hands and feet, which were prescribed by the Torah, in other words religious practice.

The stone water jars are containers, much like religion is a container. It is the holder of our belief and practice. Jesus uses the containers but transforms the contents. In other words, rather than water and washing being a sign of righteousness, partaking in the wine, or “the blood of Christ shed for you,” becomes the sign of righteousness.

Turning water into wine is nothing short of announcing the emergence of a new religion, arising from the tradition and customs of an existing religion. And this is not a little change, this is a fundamental shift.

This transformation of water into wine says something deeply profound about the ministry of Jesus and about the God we worship. What I’d like to reflect with this morning is this new righteousness, the transformation happening in the partaking of “the blood of Christ shed for you.”

In our story, Jesus transforms six stone jars of twenty to thirty gallons each into wine. You know how much wine that is? It’s pretty close to three, fifty-five-gallon barrels.

We’re talking about so much wine, they won’t know what to do with it all! And not only a huge quantity, it’s good stuff. The steward said that this is better than what they started with.

And so, with the “Blood of Christ shed for you,” we’re talking about a whole new religion that is not only more than we will ever need, it is good quality transformative religion. And this all occurs at a marriage feast, often the symbol of God and his people. This text is remarkable literature.

The theological statement being made, is that the ministry Jesus is embarking on, will result in the death of Jesus, in the spilling of his blood, and through partaking in that story and blood, transformation happens. It opens our eyes...

Partaking in the “blood of Christ shed for you” is to take notice of all the ways we hurt one another and taking responsibility for it. Every time we behave like the religious people in Jesus day, being judgmental, finger pointing, scapegoating-- it’s about seeing Jesus blood on our own hands.

In the crucifixion we see how we human beings treat each other, in the resurrection, we hear of God’s forgiveness. You see, Jesus died *exactly* to our murderous tendencies, *exactly* so we can see ourselves in a mirror, *exactly* so we can change...

And the good news today is that this is God’s work and God’s intention. Jesus came to lead us out of our murderous ways, and into a way of eternal life...

Crucifixion and resurrection are like confession and forgiveness. Good quality religion! It changes us from being people who hurt one another, to people who reconcile and love one another.

Quick story... Many years ago, when I was in college, I took a sociology class on the holocaust. It was an eye opener!

One of the primary things I took away from that class was an alarming sense about how good and decent people can do tremendously evil and violent things.

Many of the guards that worked in the concentration camps, kissed their wives goodbye in the morning, killed people all day, and went home for an evening meal with their

families as if nothing was wrong.

One of the sociological phenomena we studied was compartmentalization. Essentially the idea that every person who worked in those concentration camps had very small and specific jobs. They all had deniability. They were all part of the killing, but in their minds, they played such a small part they weren't responsible. Evil is such a tricky thing...

We studied a lot of stories of the survivors. I remember one specific story of twin girls, Eva and Miriam Mozes. I found the story again recently on the internet; an interview with Eva as well as a transcript.

They lived near a small village in Romania in the 1940s. Because they were the only Jewish family in that area, they thought the Nazis wouldn't bother with them.

But someone turned them in... At the age of 10, the twins and including the whole family were loaded onto a crowded cattle car and relocated to Auschwitz.

Eva goes on to say that exactly because they were twins, they were set apart and used for medical experiments by Dr Mengele. Eva said, "Doctor injected us three times a week with all kinds of germs and drugs and chemicals," and miraculously they lived.

After nine months of experiments in captivity, Eva and her sister were liberated from the horrors of Auschwitz by Russian soldiers.

Much later in her life Eva talked about a change that happened to her. After Auschwitz, she was understandably bitter and angry. In the interview she said, "If anybody asks me if I was angry with God, I was angry with everything, of God, the world, and everybody,"

On the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, she went back to remember and to forgive. She said, "God has a power to forgive, to forgive us, and forgive other

people... As I was standing by the ruins of the gas chamber I was remembering all the people I was forgiving. I was forgiving the Nazis. I was forgiving Mengele. I was forgiving the people that did the experiments," she said.

She continued, "I was forgiving everybody because of the fact that I have the power to forgive. It gave me an emotional freedom that was so exhilarating, so beneficial to me, that I did not have to deal with who did what to me and why. I felt that all the pain I was carrying on my little shoulders were lifted from me; that I was free. I was no longer a prisoner from my tragic past."

After 50 years of bitterness and anger, she was able to open her heart to forgive. As Luther said, wherever there is forgiveness there is life.

That Sociology class opened my eyes. And that's what crucifixion and resurrection does, it opens our eyes. It lifts up a mirror to see ourselves. And it's that mirror that is the heart and soul of confession and forgiveness. That mirror is the engine that leads to transformation. And this how we participate in the "blood of Christ shed for you." Confession and forgiveness, crucifixion and resurrection, law and gospel... It's a pattern of change...

We must always be mindful that we are saints and sinners. Our spiritual journey is about being truthful about who we are and whose we are.

As Jesus turned water into wine, we too are transformed. As we live into our baptism, we live into that marriage with God and one another. We confess and forgive, we reconcile and love...

This is a way of life that is abundant. Good quality, meaningful life... And lots of it... And I'll certainly drink to that!

Amen