

## **Where Do You Find Solace? A Reflection on John 2:1-11 from Deacon Kim Crecca**

Today, January 16<sup>th</sup>, is designated as Recovery Sunday here at St. Matthew's in response to our Diocesan commitment to raise awareness about those who struggle with the disease of addiction. There are many forms of addiction, the most recognized include drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and gambling. But there are other, more "acceptable" addictions like the addiction to power and/or wealth, medically prescribed pain killers, or how about caffeine? I can't tell you how many folks I know who admit that they can't function in the morning without their cup of joe. The whole country of Italy would crumble to its knees without their espresso! And don't even get me started on chocolate!

Thanks to recent medical findings, we now know that addiction is a stress-induced disorder that affects the brain's ability to perceive pleasure and well being in a healthy context. Regardless of whether we self-medicate through drugs, alcohol or coffee and chocolate; when taken in excess, addiction is an indication of an internal imbalance.

Almost any substance taken in moderation can be therapeutic. Yet some become dangerous when overused. Excessive alcohol/drug consumption can, and often does, dull our senses, drown our sorrows, and disguise our pain. Many people have told me that they turned to a bottle of alcohol or pills to ease the pain and stress they were experiencing, whether physical or emotional. But that fix is only temporary and often leads to the disease of addiction, rather than healing.

So, when I looked at the lectionary for this Sunday, I must admit to being intrigued to find the miracle at Cana of turning water into wine, as the Gospel reading. I was interested to find out where the Spirit was going to lead me as I reflected on this passage and how it relates to Recovery Sunday.

In case you didn't already know, I'm no Biblical scholar. My training as a deacon included all of 2 days of theological, exegetical, and homiletical training. Most of my deacon training was focused on servanthood...being the best servant I can be and encouraging you to be the best servants you can be as you strive to live according to your Baptismal Covenant. Thankfully we have Fr. Rick, Fr. Frank, Mother Ellen, Canon Clyde, and many others who can help you and me to understand the rich symbolism contained within the covers of the Bible. And symbolism is rampant in John's Gospel.

While I may not understand the deeper, intellectual levels of the Gospel according to John, it remains my favorite Gospel. The words flow across the pages like a love poem to God or by God. I can relate to the emotions invoked by the beautiful language but struggle to grasp the delicate balance between factual and symbolical.

This passage we heard today is particularly troubling for me. If I try to take the account literally, I'm plagued with questions about why Jesus would promote drunkenness. The manager admitted that the guests were drunk. Why bring out something so delicious that it will encourage those who are already 3 sheets to the wind to drink even more? Most translations of the original text make it clear that Jesus turned the water meant for ceremonial cleansing into actual fermented wine, not grape juice. Perhaps there was something special about this wine? I'm reminded of a quote from one of my favorite Christmas movies, "The Bishop's Wife", when an angel visits an elderly, down on his luck, professor and enchants his bottle of sherry so that the bottle never runs dry. The professor comments about the quality of the sherry, "it warms, it stimulates, it inspires, but it never inebriates!" I wonder if the wine that Jesus provided did the same? It's a possibility if we take the account at face value.

And then there's the scenario of a wedding to consider. Sadly, a lot of us know firsthand the damage that alcoholism/drug abuse can wreck on a family and anyone else with whom the affected person comes into contact. I've counseled many women in prison whose own dependence on drugs and alcohol ended up costing the life of someone else. One lady's drunken driving took the lives of two little children, a horror that she lives with every day and will for the rest of her life but that doesn't even compare to the grief experienced by the mother of those children. The scenario that led her to drink and drive? A drunken, adulterous husband, caught in the act. Countless marriages have been ruined by the disease of addiction resulting from abuse of alcohol, drugs, and more. Which makes the literal acceptance of Jesus's miracle at a wedding even more confusing for me. Why provide massive quantities of a substance that, when consumed in excess, is known to promote bad judgement, anger, slander, lies, destruction, and even death? A substance that, when consumed irresponsibly, rips marriages apart on a daily basis?

The literal translation of this passage, when confronted by the underlying facts, just doesn't work for me. So I plunged into my "Feasting on the Word" commentaries for help in understanding what the writer or writers of John might be trying to communicate symbolically through this inclusion of the first miracle of Jesus.

The theologians revealed that, in Biblical times, wine was closely linked to a blessing, and water or diluted wine was considered a curse. I can understand that the results of drinking contaminated water, as was the case back then and even now, could definitely be considered a curse. The commercial for Pepto-Bismol comes to mind. If we take this miracle symbolically, the writer/s of this Gospel may have meant this new, higher quality, wine to represent God's blessing. And not just a little sip of blessing. Those 6 jugs held between 20 and 30 gallons of water so the guests now had access to somewhere around 750 bottles of wine! This symbolism indicates the overabundance of God's blessings!

There's also the option to take this miracle as symbolic of the emptiness offered by the old religious practices compared to what Jesus offers...overflowing abundance, living water, wells that never run dry, people who are never thirsty or hungry again. That certainly aligns more closely with what we might expect from the Gospel of John. In this case, the analogy involves replacing the emptiness within us with an overabundance of blessings/healing from God. Jesus' ministry on earth abounds with examples of blessings and healing. Throughout the many recorded miracles in our Gospels, Jesus encourages us to depend on God for all our needs – especially emotional/spiritual ones.

In our BCP on page 372, Eucharistic Prayer C contains the words – “Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal. Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name. Risen Lord, be known to us in the breaking of the Bread.” This prayer reminds us that our solace, strength, forgiveness and renewal are found in Christ. Holy Communion includes the wine and bread as symbols of Jesus' body and blood, uniting all of us as one body in Christ. Those who seek solace in a bottle, or any other addictive substance, are living lives that are out of balance. They cannot find lasting comfort, fortitude, forgiveness, and healing/restoration without Jesus — “God with us.”

The miracle of turning the water into wine could be a poetic way of telling us about Jesus' overabundant LOVE for us and his willingness to pour himself out for us and for the forgiveness of our sins — to act upon the desires of God to heal us and reunite us with our Creator. His LOVE for us acts as a counterbalance to worldly stress and temptations. And that brings the joy of God's abundant blessings to the forefront of our lives, restoring order and balance to our often chaotic existence. This is the Good News we are to embrace and proclaim as servants of the Most High.

As we struggle against the disease of addiction in our world today, it's comforting to be reminded that God provides the strength we need to overcome all adversity, the healing necessary for our physical and emotional well-being, the comfort of knowing that we are loved unconditionally, and the forgiveness we often cannot provide or accept by ourselves. As servants of God, we are called to love ourselves and love our neighbors unconditionally in order that we may truly love God.

I may not know what the writer/s of this Gospel really meant by telling us of this first miracle, but I know what God has revealed to me. The Gospel of John has more to say about God's overabundant LOVE than any other book in the entire Bible. If I look for God's love in this passage, I find it in God's longing for us to seek God first for solace, strength, forgiveness, and renewal because that's where the real, the only, comfort for tortured minds, broken hearts, and guilt-ridden souls can be found. **AMEN.**