

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
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Clarksburg, WV

John 2:1-11

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. (John 2:11 N.R.S.V.)

Oh, I See!

Father O’Leary was pulled over by the local sheriff one day. He had been driving rather erratically. The sheriff came up to his window and asked, “Have you been drinking Father?”

Father O’Leary assured the officer, “All I have had to drink was pure, natural water.”

The sheriff was skeptical, he pointed to an open bottle in the car and asked, “Could I see that bottle for a minute?”

The good Father handed the bottle out the window as requested.

The sheriff took a sniff and then declared, “This isn’t water, Father, it is wine.”

To which Father O’Leary replied, “It is? Well, praise the Lord, he’s done it again!”

In our lesson from John we have the rather strange story of Jesus turning the water into wine at the wedding in Cana. We are told that this was the first of Jesus’ miracles or signs.

So this miracle was a sign. Now signs by their nature point to a reality beyond themselves. It might help us to know that in Bible times, wine was seen as a symbol of hospitality and warmth. Wine was also seen as a sign of God’s abundant provision for his people. That is a bit different than how we see wine today isn’t it?

We might note that Jesus uses the wine here at the beginning of his ministry and he also uses wine at the end of his ministry on earth. At the Lord’s supper, Jesus will take the cup and says, “This wine is the new covenant sealed in my blood. It is poured out for the remission of sin. Whenever you drink this wine, do so in remembrance of me.”

Now here is something rather remarkable. John tells us that after witnessing this sign of Jesus turning the water into wine, the disciples believed in him. Jesus had not started teaching his disciples yet. But this one sign was enough to open the disciples’ eyes so that they saw who he

really was. They believed in him.

Let me point out that the purpose of a sign is to point beyond itself to a greater reality. If you see a road sign that says, "Traffic light ahead," the sign is not the traffic light. The sign points to something beyond itself that is the real traffic light.

Now here is the thing about signs. Not everyone believes the sign. Not everyone gets it.

One man was telling about a sign that was posted on the road in front of his house. The sign said, "Bridge out. Road closed." The bridge was indeed washed out, but drivers could not see the washed out road from where the sign was placed. The bridge had been down the road a bit and around a sharp curve.

Some drivers believed the sign when they saw it. They stopped, turned around and went back the other way. But a surprising number of people, read the sign, slowed down, but kept on going down the road. The man telling this story was amused at the way people would creep slowly on down the road and around the bend. Only when they saw for themselves that the road was indeed washed out, would they turn around and go back up the hill. He said, people would creep down the hill, but on the way back up they went really fast. As if they were embarrassed, and didn't want anyone to see it.

The Greek word for sign also means revelation. Christianity is a revealed religion. Jesus came and lived among us and did signs, because there was no way we were going to get there on our own. We can't use our intellect and hard work to figure out who God is and how to get to heaven. That has to be revealed to us.

One of the names for Jesus was rabbi or teacher. Jesus was a teacher. He was in the, "Oh, I see" business. I think the teachers in the congregation would agree with the statement, "Telling is not teaching, and listening is not learning." Something else has to happen. My teacher daughter was telling about trying to get her students to understand a difficult concept. She said, first it was just a sea of blank faces. But as she kept talking, one student got it. "Oh, I see!" Then another. It was like watching pop corn pop. Teachers I'm told live for that moment. That is the pay off moment. "Oh, I see!"

There is that element in preaching also. Teaching, I mean. Preaching is not obfuscating. Sorry, I love that word, obfuscating. I once heard the late Senator Byrd use that word in a television interview. He said that his opponents were just obfuscating. It sounded like a made up word to me. But I looked it up and there is such a word. Someone who is obfuscating is using words to confuse the issue instead of the clarify. It means the person is trying to obscure, confuse, blur, muddle, jumble, complicate, garble, cloud, befog, bewilder, mystify, puzzle, perplex, baffle, confound, and muddy the waters. Got it?!

The purpose of preaching is not to obfuscate but to reveal. What I am hoping is that somehow through my words and the work of the Holy Spirit, you will have an "aha" moment. "Oh, now I

see!”

Here is the thing, once we get our mind set a certain way, it takes a shock or jar to get us to rethink things. The Jews had all of these preconceived notions of what the messiah would be like. Jesus performed signs to get them to stop and rethink those things. The signs pointed beyond themselves to the reality of Jesus as the son of God and savior of the world.

What does it take to change our mind? Those people who drove past the sign that said road closed were having trouble accepting a new reality. They had been thinking that the bridge was still there. They had been down this road many times before and the bridge had always been there. They had trouble believing the sign.

My brother-in-law works for the State Road Dept. He was telling me that they were working on rebuilding a bridge one day and he looked up to see an older woman weaving through all the barriers they had set up. Randy said he started yelling and waving his arms. He was afraid that she was going to drive right off the edge and into the river. He finally got her to stop, but she still didn't want to back up. She kept pointing to a commercial green house on the bank above the river. "I need to get to the green house." He said it took five or six minutes to convince her to back up. She was determined to keep going the way she had always gone.

What does it take for us to change our minds, to see things in a new light?

John tells us that Jesus did many signs so that we might believe. Some of those signs were what we might call miracles. Like the changing of water into wine. Other times Jesus told parables or gave hard teachings.

The reason that the parables often had an unexpected twist to them was because in order to have an "Oh, I see" moment, we first have to be made uncomfortable. We first have to be confronted with something that just doesn't fit.

My point is that if we take the words of Jesus seriously, those words will sometimes make us uncomfortable. Jesus meant for his words to make us uncomfortable. There is no other way for us to see the kingdom of God.

Our temptation is to read the Bible only for what we agree with and to ignore or explain away the parts that make us uncomfortable. That way leads to disaster. That way leads to us driving into the river.

My challenge to you this morning is to be willing to be made uncomfortable by the word of God.

I saw on Facebook the other day a message that said, "Be careful who you feel sorry for. There are people who are experts at lying and manipulating your emotions."

Now on the face of it, this seems like wisdom. There are people who cheat and deceive others for their own gain. Now, let's contrast that with what Jesus said in Matthew 5:42, "Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you."

Speaking only for myself, that statement from Jesus makes me very uncomfortable. I would much rather Jesus had said, “Be careful who you feel sorry for.”

“Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.” That statement seems completely impractical. It is the very opposite of common sense.

I would like to resolve this strange command for you, to somehow make it easier. But I can't.

Jesus says much the same thing in Luke 6:30-31. “Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

These sayings are signs of the kingdom. They are supposed to make us uncomfortable. The challenge is to live with the discomfort and not rush for a resolution. For only with the discomfort can we have the “Oh, I see” moments of the kingdom. For the kingdom of heaven is not like the kingdom of this world.

Amen.