

Sermon Title: Filled with New Wine

Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

On the day of Pentecost, they, the believers, were all together in one place. And suddenly there was a sound, like the rush of a violent wind. It filled the house where they were sitting. And they began to speak in other languages; people from all every nation were living in Jerusalem, just outside their door, Parthians, Medes, Cretans and Arabs, Libyans, Romans, and other places; each one present in the vicinity, heard what was being said in their own native language. All were amazed. As they spoke, their words seemed to flow out of them like tongues of fire. Someone spoke up to the crowds that were gathered there, ‘they are filled with new wine.’ Peter responds: ‘they are not drunk, for it is only the third hour of the day, only nine in the morning.’ (Acts 2:15).

You have to be in a certain frame of mind to receive a divine vision; you will need to be in a frame of mind to consume the message, breathe deeply from its words, taste its goodness, drink from its overflowing bounty. You cannot be in a cursing mood to receive this vision. You cannot be in a threatening mood to receive this vision. Instead you must be in a self-deprecating mood, a surrendering mood, to receive this vision. The Holy Spirit talks to us and through us with the words: ‘Jesus is Lord!’

John of Patmos describes the Day on which he was in the Spirit by saying: ‘I heard a loud voice behind me like a trumpet.’ (Rev. 1:10). ‘Write down what you see and send it to the seven churches of Ephesus. The prophet Joel tells us of his encounter with the Spirit, that it will come with blood, fire, and smoky mist, that the sun shall turn to darkness and the moon to blood, and then everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. It will be a time predicted by the ancient song of Kenosis quoted in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, the self-emptying, selfless song of faith, that one day every knee will bow when the name of Jesus is spoken, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Isaiah describes the visit of the Lord in the following way: ‘it comes with thunder and earthquake, whirlwind and tempest, with flames of devouring fire; “So, be drunk, but not from wine, says Isaiah, be drunk, but not from strong drink (Is. 29:6,9); for the Lord is pouring out upon you a spirit of deep sleep.” Imbibe the Spirit. Eat the scroll, breathe the Torah, taste the Lord. (Ezek. 3:3; Ps. 34:8) A vision comes to you, says Isaiah, can you read it? Are you in a space where you can hear it?

Today, on this Day of Pentecost 2024, the question persists: ‘A vision comes to

you, can you read it? It comes with the sound of rushing winds bearing tongues of fire, but the Spirit is not in the wind or fire, not in the earthquake or the whirlwind. It is in a still small voice: ‘can you hear it? Can you read it?’ You have to be in a welcoming frame of mind to hear it and to read it. You have to be in an inclusive mood to consume it properly. The Spirit is Holy. Our visions come from the same Spirit, not different spirits. All divine gifts, diverse as they may be, come from the same Spirit. They come from a giving, loving Spirit. As the Psalmist says, ‘deep calls to deep,’ and we recognize the Spirit in one another (Ps. 42:7-8). Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith, Healing—all come from the same Spirit. A vision comes to you, can you hear it, can you read it?

One answer might be that we can indeed read it ... if we have the eyes to read, if we have the ears to hear, ... if we have read it or heard it in the past ... if we are in One Spirit.

“In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all given one Spirit to drink (literally, all one Spirit were made to drink).” (1 Cor. 12:13)

Paul Murray, a Catholic author, calls on us to be drunk, not with wine, but with Godly happiness. His book is entitled *The New Wine of Spirituality: A Drink Called Happiness*. I would like to think that Peter’s words on that first Pentecost refer to the new wine of joy and gladness experienced on that day. The language of that first Pentecost was inebriated with a fullness of joy. The context of that joy was the message of Pentecost, that there is no Gentile nor Jew, no slave nor free, no male nor female, no circumcised nor uncircumcised (Gal. 3:8; Col. 3:11). Speaking more broadly, there is no Jew nor Arab, no Parthian nor Mede, no Elamite nor Judean no Cappadocian nor Cretan, no Libyan nor Roman, no Egyptian nor Phrygian. The dark-skinned people at the southern end of the earth are One with the light-skinned people at the northern end of the earth (no Scythian nor Barbari). The same with the eastern end of the earth or the western end of the earth. It is not necessarily that we are magically color-blind, theoretically impartial, bias-free, but more that God has stood in the breach and translated us to each other, transformed us in a moment with a peace that passes all understanding, a peace that cannot be explained away or argued down. Our differences are real, they are known, owned and acknowledged; what unites us is spiritual, revealed, received and accepted.

Another answer to our question, whether we can read, whether we can hear, Pentecost: might be surprising to you. You might be able to read Pentecost, you

might be able to hear Pentecost, if you have been able to save the best for last, if you have not used up the best at the beginning.

“Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have had their fill. But you have kept the best wine until now.” (John 2:10)

How many times have we heard it said, ‘they saved the best till last.’ It’s a common saying, but not always true. Sometimes predictive of the ideal, but unrealistic. Sometimes, impossible to measure what is the best. But assuming it is possible, it flows from the idea that we give our best to God, our first-fruits, if you will, a libation of liquids or grains prior to consuming them, a preliminary dedication to the Lord of what we are about to receive into our bodies. Usually, we are at our best in the mornings, as we begin our day. Hence, the first-fruits being the best we have to offer God. We return to God the first, the best, of our produce before enjoying the rest.

However, in the story of the miracle at Cana, the bridegroom saves the best for last. It is the reverse order of libations and first-fruits; the reverse order of what is natural. When the last is best, there is nothing left to do but be grateful and drop the microphone. In modern weddings, we say “something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue.” But, in this ancient wedding at Cana, instead of looking backward to find greatness, we are called to look forward to greater things. The wedding guests did not exhaust the best of the wine at the beginning, but could savor the wine throughout, and even more toward the end. Just think, how would we feel if our firefighters set off all the July fireworks in one big splurge at the beginning rather than at the end? It would feel unnatural. We want the effects to linger with us through the entire experience. What if all succeeding acts in a show fell short of the opening act? Would we not leave early? A disappointing encore? The message at Cana is that the Messiah ushers in a world better than anything we have ever seen before. In fact, “Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, mind has not conceived of what God has prepared for those who have a loving heart (1 Cor. 2:9; Is. 64:4).”

The wedding feast is a foretaste of the meals to come (Ps. 34:8, Heb. 6:5, 1 Pet. 2:3). the Passover meal with the disciples (John 13), a supper of broiled fish [and honeycomb] in the upper room (Lk 24:42), the breakfast on the shore (Jn 21:12), the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9). It is a reminder of past meals like Elijah’s meal with the widow of Zarephath, from a jar of meal that never emptied, a jug of oil that never failed (1 Kgs. 17:8-14). It is also a remembering of past meals such as Ezekiel’s strange meal, eating the scroll of God’s words, filling his

stomach with them, words as sweet as honey, but also words difficult to speak, full of lamentation and mourning (Ezek. 3:1-6, Rev. 10:9-10).

The empty water jugs of Jewish purification are filled with new wine, abundant wine. The miracle at Cana produces some 120-180 gallons (v.6) needed for the local feast. Like the feeding of the 5,000, or the 3,000, it supplies the need and then some, as it overflows the need. The miracle at Cana seems much more than just refilling water jugs and renewing religious purification. It seems more than just providing a religious meal for the spiritually hungry and those thirsting for life's meaning. The miracle of Cana in the Gospel of John gives us insight into the parables of the other gospels, why we cannot simply put new wine into old wineskins without ruining the wine, why we must only pour new wine into new wineskins (Mt 9:14-17, Lk 5:33-39 Mk 2:18-22). The gospel pulls against the constraints of the past to break those bonds and forge a new pathway, a new church that is unconstrained; old structures, methods and forms, while important in their time, cannot possibly hold the new. As we seek our new settled pastor here at WOCC, this gospel principle would be a good one on which to structure our biblical story. At Pentecost, our sermons should reflect saving the best for last, not in promising something that cannot be delivered, but in receiving something already delivered. New wine, new wineskins!

So, are we grateful when first and last align, when alpha and omega come together, when worst and best overlay? In a world beyond our experience but within our possibility. Where marriages are not set or fixed in a single day but require a lifetime of commitment. Where the *declining* never overshadows the *becoming*. The wedding at Cana is such a place, such a moment in time. The first miracle of Jesus does not bring sadness, but happiness to the human heart (Ps. 104:15). We are no longer satisfied with fleeting or transitory love, but desire eternal love, forever love, to meet our needs.

In one of her letters to a close friend, Bartolomeo, Catherine of Sienna writes of a wine 'which intoxicates the soul so that the more one drinks of it the more one wants to drink.' Speaking to God, she writes: "You are sweetness itself, stooped to join yourself with our bitterness, your splendor joined to our darkness, your wisdom to our foolishness, your life joined to our death." In the deeper wells of your mercy, 'O God, we find our truest selves, our best selves.'"

Jeremiah writes that he had become like one who was drunk, sodden with wine, overcome by wine, in his encounter with God's word (Jer. 23:9), his heart crushed within, his very bones quaking over what his eyes read and his ears heard. God's

word to Jeremiah was like a hammer that breaks rocks into little pieces. When Jeremiah enters into the joy of the Lord, he finds a new wine that lifts his heart and steadies his bones. “Because God’s mercies never fail, we are not consumed by evil; Indeed, God’s mercies are new every morning.” (Lam. 3:22).

The wedding stewards had approached Jesus saying: ‘we have no wine.’ And truly, they were right. The wines of justice were running out, the wines of wisdom were running out, the wines of charity were running out, the wines of love were running out. What would become of the marriage under such conditions? When Jesus changed the waters into wine, he was renewing the hearts of the people, to seek justice, wisdom, and charity with deeper resolve, to transform fear into love.

On the day of Pentecost, those who gathered to hear Peter were filled with the Holy Spirit, but perhaps not in the way that we might expect. They appeared to be drunk at 9:00 in the morning, at the beginning of the day. It was a reversal of what many might expect. They had emptied themselves of their own individual spirits, their old wine if you will, and filled themselves with a strange new wine. The wine of the Gospel filled their veins; the love of God filled their hearts. Happy are those whose minds are stayed upon thee! Happy are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled! (Mt. 5:6)

The meals of Christ expand the heart and the mind. When we enter into God’s joy, we lack no good thing, our desires are satisfied, our broken hearts are mended, our crushed spirits redeemed (Ps. 34) Alleluia! Amen.