

Wesley United Methodist Church

January 20, 2019

"The Change."

John 3:1-11

There's an old story about a skeptic who continually harassed the local pastor. His one delight in life seemed to be making the pastor appear inadequate intellectually. The pastor bore those challenges to his theology and faith with great restraint.

One day the skeptic was heckling the pastor about his views on miracles. "Give me one concrete example of a miracle," the skeptic taunted. "One concrete example." The pastor hauled off and kicked the skeptic in the shin as hard as he could. The skeptic yelled and couldn't believe what the pastor did. "What did you do that for?" he cried. The pastor asked, "Did you feel that?" "Yes," the man cried as he nursed his sore leg. "Well, if you hadn't," said the pastor, "it would have been a miracle."

I'm not sure that was the best way to explain miracles, but there have been times when I've wanted to explain things that way. Today we look at the very first miracle performed by Jesus as recorded in John's Gospel.

Jesus and his mother, along with all the disciples, were attending a wedding feast in Cana when the wine ran out. Mary turned to her son, "They've no wine," she said. There was something in the tone of her voice that told Jesus she expected him to do something. Jesus' response seemed a little harsh. In the original Aramaic it's not nearly as abrupt or disrespectful as it seemed to sound. "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

Still, Jesus' heart went out to his hosts. He felt their embarrassment. He apparently knew the family and cared about their predicament and wanted to do something to help. So, he turned six stone jars (each holding 20-30 gallons each) filled with water, to wine. That's between 120 to 180 gallons of wine. That's three 55 gallon barrels of wine. Or somewhere between 600 to 900 bottles of wine. Do you get the picture? That's a lot of wine. So, what do we learn from this miracle, other than to make sure Jesus is on your guest list when you have a party?

I could talk about miracles in general and how over the past century of enlightenment we've tried to explain miracles in a rational manner. For example, rather than believing that Jesus actually fed 5000 with five loaves of bread and two fish, we explain it away by explaining that everyone gathered that day was so moved by that little boy's generosity, that they all shared everything they had brought with them. Basically, that says, Jesus blessed what the boy brought and everyone shared in a huge potluck luncheon.

I'm not sure which would be the greater miracle, multiplying the bread and fish or getting 5000 people to share their lunch. Actually, I'm okay with the miracles because our faith is based on the biggest miracle of all, the Resurrection. But that's not what I want to talk about.

I could talk about the symbolism of the first miracle in John being tied up in all the wedding customs of the day and how that translates into John's understanding of Jesus being the Bridegroom and the Church being the bride.

You see a betrothal took place in this way. The young man, the future husband would go to the father with wine and a couple of glasses. The father would sit at the head of the table, the future son-in-law on the right and the daughter on his left. Discussion would take place about the dowry, and home and all those details. But it all came down to one point where the groom poured a glass of wine and offered it to the bride to be. If the bride to be took the cup and drank from it, they were engaged or betrothed as they said back then.