

Tap Water

A few Sundays ago, right after the service, I was accosted by 2 of the under 12 crowd. These two boys had a burning question. “Where do you get the water to baptize children? Is it from the Jordan River? “No.” Is it from sacred pools on Maui?

“No”. “Is it just tap water?!”), they asked with clearly disappointed faces? “Why, yes it is!”, I told them. As they moped away, it occurred to me how young we are when we fall into the trap. You know the trap I’m talking about. The trap of figuring that God is only to be found in the fantastic, the far away. The trap, it seems, even catches the boys who are not yet 12. And the trap? It is the trap that let’s us separate our lives into “Monday to Saturday” lives, on the one hand; and Sunday lives on the other. It seems to be our earliest instinct to push God out to the margins of the fantastic, the unusual, the far away.

We like it that way, you know. Because when God is far away, we can do it our way! Think about it. God says: “trust in me in all things.” We say: “Cash is king.” God says: “every person on this earth is my child, and you are all brothers and sisters.” We say: “Stick to your own kind.” God says: “Forgive.” We say: “Get even.” God says: “Peace.” We say: “pre-emptive war.” God says: “love”. We say: “Get real!”

That’s what happens when we wander far away from the Creator of all that is; She who is, as the scholars say, the Ground of All Being.

Our Declaration of Independence from the God who made us has been our undoing. Thankfully, God refuses to accept our “no”. Into our independence, into our “no”, into the mess we have made of this free gift of creation, comes the God of all, and today, we find him at a wedding.

John begins his gospel story of the ministry of Jesus right here, at the wedding at Cana. Jesus and his disciples and Mary are all there. Now, weddings then are different than weddings today. There were no highly selective guest lists. Everyone came. The wedding didn’t last a few hours, it lasted 7 days. Usually it was the social event of the year in these small, poor towns of ancient Israel, the talk of the town. Plenty of food and plenty of drink were expected. And at this particular wedding, the unthinkable happened. The wine ran out!

With no Costco or Safeway to send Uncle Ernie to for more wine; that bride and groom would be the talk of the town alright, they were about to be the year’s social embarrassment. What does Jesus do? First, he protests. He isn’t ready. That kind of protest is common with the prophets. Moses protested he couldn’t speak for God because he stuttered. Jeremiah protested that he was too young. Isaiah lamented his dirty mouth.

And here Jesus seems to scold his mom, telling her the time wasn't yet ripe. She ignored him, as mothers are prone to do, when a child, even an adult child, pipes up. "Do what he tells you", she told the waiters. And what does he tell them, but to fill up the foot washing jugs.

Now, I promise you, this was not treated drinking water that was put in those jugs. Foot washing water is about as ordinary as you can get when you're talking water. Nothing special about it at all. And then it happened. That most ordinary of water, was, by God's grace, turned into the finest wine, as a gift to this newlywed couple.

What I hope our two boys who accosted me last week come to see is that it is not the extraordinary occasion that God is in. Instead, God turns ordinary occasions, ordinary people, our ordinary lives, God turns all of these extraordinary, and does so by using the most ordinary things: like tap water to baptize; like bread and wine, as God becomes present among us in the Eucharist; like you and I to be the hands and feet of God in the lives of one another.

What I wanted those two boys to know is that God doesn't need us to run all over for exotic water from a far distant place to work the miracle of baptism. In fact, we probably shouldn't do that. Everything in the gospel tells us that God comes in what we dismiss as the run of the mill, or worse. The shepherds to whom the angels appeared? In first century Israel, they were the lowest of the low. Few had worse reputations. Few smelled as bad. They were at the bottom of the social register.

Yet to them came the heavenly host announcing the astonishing news of God born among us.

It is in the ordinary, daily living that we share with one another; it is in the cool of the morning at sunrise, what we so often pass off as ordinary---is in fact the extraordinary creation of God. All of this creation. All of this life. From nothing! All of it a gift to us. So, let's not forget to remember that what we so often call ordinary is in fact extraordinary.

That guy or gal sitting right next to you? She's made out of dust, but she's infused with the breath of God. Even that lowly tap water that so disappointed our children. It didn't begin as tap water. It began as the miracle of rain, that then soaked through miles of rock to finally make its way into the vast underground reservoirs that lie in the depths of our islands. Ordinary things that are indeed extraordinary!

Bishop Willimon of Alabama tells the story of being invited to speak at an inner city

church one Sunday. Like us here, he expected to be in and out in an hour or so. When an hour and a half rolled around, and he hadn't even been invited to speak, he began to fidget. Finally, he got his chance, finally the service ended, and as he was leaving, some three hours after he arrived, he asked the pastor why the service was so long. The pastor told him: Out there our people live in a world that says to them, every day, "You are nobodies". "You have no fine car", "You have no fine house", "You have no job." By the standards of the world, you are nobodies. So once a week, we gather together here, to sing, to pray, to give thanks, and in these few hours, once a week, we remember that we are some bodies. We who were once no people: We are the people of God! We are the people of God!

Like fine wine from foot washing water. Like baptism from tap water. So are you. So am I. Made of the earth, you and I, yet, we are given the breath of God.

I leave you with this. The wedding at Cana says something wonderful about the nature of God. Our God is Trinity. Three persons in one God. God is a God in relationship. The essence of God is relationship. And this God loves a good party! This is a God who lets his hair down! This is a God who takes off her shoes and has a good time! And this is a gracious God.

Did you hear what Jesus didn't say to those newlyweds? Like: "Too bad, you should have planned better!" or "Sorry, you get what you deserve!" NO! There is none of that. Instead there are gallons upon gallons upon gallons of the best wine! Freely given!

Do you see the extravagance of God? Do you see the wastefulness of grace?! It is the sower who sows seeds wildly in every direction! This is our God! This God of tap water and fine wine. This is the God who calls us home.

Hear again today's psalm, if you think I'm going too far: "How priceless is your love O God! Your people take refuge under the shadow of your wings. They feast upon the abundance of your house. You give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the well of life and in your light, we see light!"

As Elizabeth Browning put it: "Earth is crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God. But only he who sees takes off his shoes; the rest sit round it, and pick blackberries."

Amen+

david+