

First Presbyterian Church
Cheyenne, Wyoming
January 17, 2010
Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: Water into Wine

Isaiah 62: 1-5, I Corinthians 12: 1-11, John 2: 1-11

Thank you for your generosity in your giving to the church this past year. In a very tough economy, your offerings to this ministry of Jesus Christ were only \$8500 less than we budgeted for 2009. This is much better than the \$48,000 deficit we faced at the end of September. You also practiced very wise stewardship of the funds we had, for we spent almost \$52,000 less than budgeted, so we came out very well, budget wise. Your generous pledges for this year have given us great hope of a good fiscal year in 2010. Your generosity in a sense has turned water into wine. Instead of having to water down our ministry, we were able to give it the flavor and richness like a good wine might bring to a meal.

This is how God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit work in our lives as we will see as we explore today's scriptures. We will hear of how they change our lives from water into wine by being extravagantly generous with God's grace.

In the passage from Isaiah, the people of God known as Israel were told that their lives were being turned from very bad water into a joyful and sparkling wine by the grace of God. For many years prior to this passage, the people had been like polluted water and sour wine. They had followed arrogant idol worshipping rulers and their spiritual and public lives were filled with sinful misbehavior. They were a recalcitrant people who refused to repent and follow God's ways no matter how many times God warned them. In his grief and wrath God called Israel "Forsaken", "Not my people" and declared their land, "Desolate." God's people eventually suffered with humiliation and shame from 721 B.C. to 538 B.C. because God had allowed the Assyrians and Babylonians to overrun Israel and Judah and to exile the people to foreign places.

But, in 538 B.C., by his extravagantly generous grace alone, God forgave his people and returned them to their land which needed a great deal of rebuilding. In a sense, God was turning them from polluted waters into purified fine wine. God celebrated the reconciliation with his people with great joy, the joy a bridegroom would have as his bride walked down the aisle. No longer would his people walk in shame, because God would vindicate or restore them. No longer would God's people be called "Forsaken" and "Desolate." Instead, God would call his people: "You shall be called My Delight is in Her," "and your land, Married." What an extravagantly generous God this was who wanted to be in love with and married to his people.

When we sin against God, others and ourselves, and arrogantly march our way through life thinking we do not need God nor to practice his ways, we have become as forsaken and desolate as Israel became 2700 years ago. We have rejected God's marriage proposal like the Israelites did. Yet, God still stands ready to redeem, forgive and restore us by his extravagantly generous grace in Jesus Christ. He will turn us from polluted waters into purified fine wine if we will repent and return to him. In fact,

he will come to us in his extravagantly generous grace in the most unexpected ways to clean up our lives and change us.

The celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day this weekend presents a context for God's extravagantly generous grace to purify and modify our lives. "While our nation has made great progress in eliminating racial tensions, there is still work to do. We in the church have the responsibility to combat the sin of racism. We need to set the example for others to follow." The following story will help illustrate how God's extravagantly generous grace can surprise people with the opportunity to include people of other races.

"Someone shared his experience of this surprising grace when he visited a church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in September 2005. The membership of the old Southern Baptist Church in Baton Rouge was all white and as the pastor put it, plagued with some of the old mindsets of segregated thinking. Then the hurricane hit, soon there were a half a million people evacuated to Baton Rouge from New Orleans. With so many more people everything in that city was affected, from stores to traffic patterns to church attendance. Because of these changes, this particular white church had to live out its Christianity with approximately 100 new black strangers attending every week. In years past the pastor had stated that the church wanted to be more multicultural; now it was a reality." By the purifying grace of God who can change us from polluted waters into fine wine, "may we continue to break down the walls of racism that divide us!" The extravagantly generous grace of God is helping us to do this. Tim S. in "Emphasis," January, 2010.

Some 565 years after the restoration of Israel, this extravagantly generous grace of God was still needed by God's people. God sent his son, Jesus, through whom his extravagantly generous grace to turn water into wine, and to save a newly married couple from embarrassment and shame at their wedding reception.

Wedding receptions in the time of Jesus were not too different from ours. Lots of food, good wine and dancing were involved in the celebration. To run out of food or wine would bring great humiliation upon the parents and the couple. Jesus and his mother were at the wedding and no doubt were friends of the families. A socially shameful event was about to take place, the wine was running out. This triggered a terse and bewildering conversation between Jesus and his mother. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." By Jewish standards of those days Jesus was not being rude to his mother. He was simply telling her that she was pushing him into action in his ministry before God's set time. Yet, she must have known he would fix the problem anyway, for she told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." The mother of Jesus also said this because she was affirming the authority God had given Jesus to share his extravagantly generous grace.

Jesus then responded to the situation and his mother with God's amazing and abundant grace. He ordered that six 20-30 gallon containers be filled with water. When the wine steward tasted it, nearly 180 gallons of water had instantly become very fine wine. This was an extravagantly generous act of grace. The wedding reception and

maybe even the marriage were saved by Jesus, but much, much more had taken place by his power and his love.

When one considers how much work and time goes into making very fine wine, it does not seem rational that Jesus could instantly do this. But this miracle “cannot be explained by conventional reasoning. Jesus’ disciples rightly saw what was going on there---they saw God’s grace in the miraculous abundance of good wine as a sign of God’s presence among them. They recognized the revelation of God in the prodigious flow of wine, and they recognized Jesus as the one who brought God to them. The miracle of the wine shattered the boundaries of their conventional world, and the disciples were willing to entertain the possibility that this boundary breaking marked” God’s smashing through their preconceived notions of how he works in their lives.

“This extravagance of Jesus’ act, the superabundance of the wine, also suggests the unlimited grace that God’s presence in Jesus makes available. Jesus’ ministry begins with an extraordinary act of grace, a first glimpse of the ‘greater things’ to come. This wedding story invites the reader to share in the wonder of this miracle, to enter into the joyous celebration made possible by Jesus turning water into wine. The story invites the reader to see what else the disciples saw, that in the abundance and graciousness of Jesus’ miracle, one catches a glimpse of the identity and character of God. It is no wonder that the early Christian community confessed ‘from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace’ (1:16). They saw that God was present with them in Jesus, and so they ‘believed in him’ (2:11) as the revealer of God.” Through this miracle, we can realize this, too. We can begin to see in Jesus that God loves us as described in our Presbyterian wedding litany. God’s love for us is like “the full expression of the love between a man and a woman where a woman and a man belong to each other, and with affection and tenderness freely give themselves to each other.” If we realize what the disciples did in this miracle, then we can see that Jesus, the Son of God, is the one, who by extravagantly generous grace can change our lives from water into wine, very fine wine. [TNIBC_Vol. IX, pg. 540.](#)

Another way in which God changes us from water into wine is by the Holy Spirit.

According to Paul, it is the Holy Spirit of God that persuades us to say, “Jesus is Lord.” It is this Spirit that bonds us to God in Jesus Christ like a man and a woman are bonded in a marriage. It is this Holy Spirit that further refines us as a wine by giving us an extravagant abundance of “gifts”—“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Each gift is given “by the same Spirit.” In each marriage, in each church, or each social situation in our lives, every person involved has a variety of gifts given by the same Spirit of God for the common good. This is just great!

However, the challenge involved with all these different gifts is to get us to work together for the common good as in the gift of marriage given to us by God. Marriage is “for the “joining together of a man and woman, the well-being of human society, for the ordering of family life, for the birth and nurture of children and for the promotion of the Kingdom of God.”

Working for the common good can be a hard thing to do in a marriage or in any relationship. Our individual pride can get in the way. This was a problem in the church in Corinth which is why Paul wrote what he did, and it is a problem today as seen in

this story. "A former US president and his wife were reputed to have visited their old hometown and stopped for gas. The attendant happened to be an old acquaintance who had once taken the wife to a high school dance. Driving away, the president remarked, "Aren't you glad you didn't marry him, honey? You'd never have gotten out of town." His wife flashed a saccharine smile and retorted, "If I had married him, he would be president today and you would still be washing dishes!" Oh yes, there exists the problem of individual pride in common relationships which can turn the fine wine of God's grace into bland dish water." "Emphasis," January/February, 2007

The truth is that we do need each other's variety of gifts of the Spirit to work for the common good in marriages, in the church or in society. Baby, James Alyxandyr Van Alyne, whom we just baptized, will need us to use these gifts of the Spirit for the common good if we are going to raise him to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior someday. We all need the gifts of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit to be miraculously changed from water into the finest wine. We all need these gifts of the Spirit to practice the repentance, reconciliation, and renewal that Israel experienced with God, to see God in Jesus as did the disciples, and to call Jesus "Lord" as did the Corinthians.

In thinking back over today's scriptures, I have also realized that God has proposed marriage to us like he did the people of Israel. Jesus has prepared the wedding reception by offering to turn our lives from water into the finest wine. The Holy Spirit has an endless variety of gifts to give us. Let us, respond to all of this extravagantly generous grace with our whole hearts by saying, "Yes," to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

