

Epiphany II Year C

“Jesus said to them fill the jars with water, and they filled them up to the brim.”

Ever since our pipes froze last Saturday I've been thinking a lot about water. It was the topic of my blog this week, but writing about it didn't stop my thinking about it.... I thought about what water's like when it's hot...what it feels like when it is cold....about the marvel of ice. How playful water is in mountain streams....How it behaves in clouds...the power of it in oceans...the cool and gentle taste of it in the middle of the night....its aptitude for color...silver, green, blue, rose and gold and gray... and black in a thunderstorm... the pure majesty of it...and the danger as well....water, at once lethal and at once life giving.... There is no religion in the world that we know of that doesn't practice some form of water Ritual...Baptism being ours...About mid week, It crossed my mind that our very bodies are almost two thirds comprised of water...It showed up coincidentally in a cross-word puzzle this week....water to Pierre, the clue...eau I scribbled....I remember some of my college French.

And then Friday I was driving along Government Street to the church and Katharine had apparently changed the radio station to 92 ZEW...I usually have it on NPR...But there it was plain as day...the Talking Heads singing...Take me to the river....wash me in the water....Now I must say, I love the talking heads (I know that there are at least two Talking Heads aficionados in the congregation)...and while I sat in the parking lot listening to the entire song, I began remembering their music of the late seventies and eighties...How they were so passionate about the possibility of paradise on earth....and though they wrote music in an age characterized by nihilism and the deconstruction of tradition...they're music is ingeniously prophetic and warmly hopeful....and.... they rock!

Our story today in John's gospel is a story about water, and a story about the possibility of paradise in earth... We've already had one story about water in this gospel...the narrative of Jesus' baptism; and here just a few lines later another water story...Jesus' first sign we are told...So having these stories so close together, the writer is tipping us off that they are connected...Jesus' baptism, and water changed to wine...the writers of this text consistently use the miracle stories to make their theological points. So let's look closely here at the parts of the story.

First, the scene is a wedding feast, the ubiquitous allusion to, a symbol for, God's coming reign in both Hebrew scripture and the new testament literature.... the consummation, as it were, of heaven and earth...so we're talking God's coming kingdom here....the image of fine wine, also, an image of God's lavish coming, the fruition of the kingdom, throughout Judean biblical literature....Listen to how Isaiah puts it in the twenty-fifth chapter, some four hundred years earlier: “On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will make for all peoples (all peoples) a feast of rich food, a feast of well aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over the earth...the sheet that is spread over all the nations. He will swallow up death forever.”

Here in our reading John is looking to the tradition for the time-honored metaphor for God's coming, a proven typology to make his point, and he uses several at once... wedding, feast, water and wine...all images of heaven in earth, images of hope and expectation...and therefore all images of transformation:...a wedding is the beginning of love and new life, a transformation of love in its maturing....a feast literally transforms our bodies with nourishment so that we are empowered for the way ahead....in Baptism we say we are transformed from being enslaved to sin into the very resurrection life of Christ...transformation from death to life...and wine, the soothing and ecstatic produce of mere grapes transformed...and John's not talking about the cheap stuff here....this ain't Winn Dixie box wine...this is the real deal....rich and fine and abundant....and we must pay attention to another issue here in this story as well...We've been told what the coming kingdom looks like:...It looks like a wedding feast with an unlimited supply of wine...but what of its timing...when, this kingdom? Jesus declares to his mother that his time has not yet come...and she waves him off in a moment...and we learn that indeed it is his time and the time is now. The coming change, the coming age is now...and we don't look to the heavens for its coming...but in the midst of artful sacrifice and hospitality....nothing magical about it...but the divine life present in something as mundane as a celebratory meal among friends...mundane like water...like wine

And the time is now for us too...we bearing the waters of baptism...in the earthen ware of our souls...we the bearers of God's ecstatic abundance....we the sent ones just as Jesus is sent, the writer tells us. It is we who are to keep the feast going past the dark of night and well into the morning and in to the coming weeks, and throughout the ages....our life's work, this, the first sign....it is our time to change water into wine...and wine enough for all people and all nations....Dear people of God...fill your hearts to the brim with the living water of baptism, the water of sacrifice, the water of loving neighbor...water become the wine of courage, water become the wine of justice, water become the wine of compassion and mercy....wine that heals and dignifies....we now the wine aged well and strained clear and offered in joy to all....destroying the shroud of death....swallowing it up...and bringing abundant life without end.

We, dear friends of God, all of us, are wine stewards...caretakers and pourers of God's life in earth....and so there is great rejoicing... rejoicing for this water we bear become wine...for now the feast doesn't end, but continues on forever....and there is quite enough for all.... And it is so very good.