

Sine Domino Frustra Laboramus

Second Sunday after Epiphany
January 17 2010
Glendale Lutheran Church

A FORESTASTE OF THE FEAST TO COME

John 2:1-11; Isaiah 62:1-5

I.

Of all the words, images, pictures, emails, please for help, and interviews regarding the earthquake in Haiti – and you have seen and heard and read more than I -- the lead article in the Post-Dispatch on Thursday concluded, *“During a driving tour of the capital on Wednesday...an analyst with the International Crisis Group said she...witnessed heroic recovery efforts. ‘There are people digging with their hands, searching for people in the rubble... there was unimaginable destruction.’ More than 30 significant aftershocks of magnitude 4.5 or higher rattled Haiti through Wednesday...The aftershocks sent people running out of homes into the street Wednesday night. Many decided it would be safer to remain in the street, chatting with neighbors and wondering what would come next in Port-au-Prince. Then the singing began. Those gathered outside tents, on lawn chairs, sitting in the middle of empty streets, sang their hymns. One phrase in Creole could be heard repeatedly, as if those voicing the words were trying to make sense of the madness around them. ‘Beni Swa Leternel,’ they sang, “blessed be the Lord!”* Pat Robertson may have his own sorry version of why what happened, happened; I heard another response, much more favorable to my heart and ear – “Maybe it’s still another grim reminder, ‘Pay attention to the poor we have so much to learn

from them!” For sure, it adds a depth of meaning to our Vision, “Serving Christ Serving Others.

Compared to that, and all of the horror stories and pictures following that devastation, and those that are yet to come, it’s pretty difficult to focus on much else for now, including a Gospel reading about running out of wine at a wedding party. But to the wedding we shall go, or at least to the reception. I have often wondered why the Lord chose this to be the first of his many miracles, something seemingly far more inane than healing a blind beggar or raising to life again a dear friend. Saying that, I invite you to go with me these next minutes to pursue just that – why providing very good wine for a wedding was Jesus’ first manifestation of his divinity, his ‘Epiphany.’

II.

Strange as it may sound, the first lesson has some wedding language in it as well, or marriage affirmation, between the Almighty God and his chosen people, Israel, languishing in exile, enslaved and impoverished and desiring to be free in body and spirit. And the Lord through the prophet give that assurance – from exile they would come, and be free. Note the images of marriage: like a new bride, Israel will be “queenly,” wearing the tiara of splendor and be the belle of the ball. She shall have a new name, Hephzibah, which means, “My delight is in her,” and “Beulah,” which means, literally, “married.”

There is a spiritual song entitled “Beulah Land,” one verse of which sings, “My Savior comes and walks with me And sweet communion here have we; He gently leads me with the hand For this is heaven’s borderland. O Beulah Land, sweet Beulah Land, as on thy highest mount I stand, I look away across the sea, Where mansions are prepared for me, And view the shining glory shore – My heaven, my home forevermore!” *Bene Swa*

Leternal...Blessed be the Lord! If it's difficult to say that now, you will, you eternally will!

III.

Regarding that wedding at Cana, there are all sorts of emphases we could share: the dialog between mother and son; that Jesus was no prude, and felt comfortable sharing in such festive occasions; the actual miracle itself, changing water into wine, and some possible sacramental overtones.

All of that, however, shall play second-fiddle to Jesus' initial words to his mother, "My hour is not yet come."

What did he mean by that? That he didn't have time for such minutia, that the wine shortage wasn't his problem, nor should it be hers?

Receive his response within the context of these poignant verses, also in John's Gospel: right after Palm Sunday, chapter 12, *Jesus said, 'THE HOUR HAS COME for the Son of Man to be glorified...Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name.'* Again, four days later, on Maundy Thursday evening, John writes, *It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the TIME HAD COME FOR HIM TO LEAVE THIS WORLD AND GO TO THE FATHER. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.*" And he commenced to wash their feet. Finally, on that same evening, he began his high priestly prayer with these words: *Father, THE TIME HAS COME. Glorify your son, that your son may glorify you.*"

That's what, in some cryptic way, Jesus was already looking ahead to Holy Week, and so saying to his mother: there's much more to my life here on this earth than bailing people out of jams; there's much more to my mission on this earth than making sure people have a good time at parties; I may be

your son, humanly speaking, but I am also the Son of God. I am here to die for the sins of the world. I am here to restore the broken relationship between the Father and his wayward people. I am here to make full and complete restitution for one and for all. I am here to redeem them, to redeem you; I am here to be the world's Savior.”

That does not render not having enough wine at a wedding celebration trivial or insignificant. To the contrary, it would have been incredibly embarrassing – in those days, and today, for that matter – for the host. Jesus did, and does, respond to the immediate, earthly needs of people. He didn't admonish the couple for not planning better; if the needs were urgent, he would respond urgently. (That's why the offerings for Haiti these next three weeks – we're going to be more specific where our humble offerings shall go in a few weeks, and how they may best be used – for now, we're just inviting people to share; and that's why we're doing the Kids Against Hunger packaging event this Saturday, not in a month!

But all of what our Lord did then is set within the context of his infinitely greater miracle; the miracle of salvation, pointing to that great and glorious day when all who believe in the Lord who has redeemed the world will gather at a heavenly banquet, a wedding feast that will not end in a day or a week, but shall go on eternally.” Changing water into wine? That is but... A Foretaste of the Feast to Come. That's why the Lord chose this to be his first miracle (I believe, anyway) for in so doing, the Lord is inviting us to living in the promise of that eternal time when and where there will be no more pain or suffering or death or earthquakes or wars or maiming of bodies or hearts that go quiet in the night. Maybe that's what the singing was about on the silent streets of Port-au-Prince, echoing in the midst of the earth

opening up without warning, why they could hope and pray as they sang,
“Bene Swa Leternel,” “Blessed be the Lord.”

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.