

January 17, 2010
Scarboro United Church
Calgary AB
J. Paul Mullen

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 • John 2:1-11

“Gifts For Hard Times”

Referring to the part of today’s Gospel story where the wine runs out and Jesus is implored by Mary, his mother, to Do something!, Roddy Hamilton, a Church of Scotland Minister in Clydebank, writes in his blog:

The question I have about this passage is two fold - how did Jesus mother know he could solve the problem of the empty wine jars? Had he been filling hers when they ran dry as he grew up, or providing bread when the loaf was finished? Or is it just a device in order to tell let us find out who Jesus was? It would help with the food bills however.

One of Roddy’s congregants, Sandra, replies:

Maybe she didn't know; maybe she had got fed up with a son who was supposed to be something special still hanging on to her coat-tails that she dared him to prove he was worth all the crap she had no doubt had to endure when she fell pregnant out of wedlock . . . I'm not a great lover of all the miracle stuff.

I'm not a big fan of all the miracle stuff@ either. Like her and perhaps like you, I am a product of a time that is all too scientific and logical. Yet we are each of us, fully human. At some level we know, or at least suspect, there is more.

Poetry can help us in the tension between logic and “more.” Again to quote Roddy Hamilton:

The Cana wedding:
stone jars brim full of wine,
but of course it is more than that.
On the surface a potential disaster averted
by a quick thinking mother of Jesus,
but it is a revelation,
a revealing of who Jesus is:
the one whose generosity is more than enough.
Revealed:
The excessive grace of the coming realm.

What happens when the wine runs out?

The wine ran out for Haiti this past week. Disasters, potential or otherwise, do happen and we struggle to understand why. Televangelist Pat Robertson would have us believe the Haitian earthquake was

punishment from God because of a supposed and thoroughly unsubstantiated pact with the devil presumably made when the Haitians went to war against their French colonialist oppressors in the late 1700s.

On the other hand, Jesus the one Robertson supposedly follows says that God makes the sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil. And when eighteen people are killed when the tower at Siloam collapses he asks his disciples if they think those who died were worse sinners than anyone else clearly expecting a No! for an answer.

But then, Pat Robertson, whatever his intentions are, has been inoculating reasonable people against Christianity for his whole career and is a multi-millionaire as a result.

What happens when the wine runs out?
Inspired by another poem I will share with you later, and thinking of Haiti and Cana and us, I wrote:

Shift happens
Often there is nothing we can do
The ground shifts
Sliding back and forth
Brutally
Haiti
Collapses
A disaster
Not of geography
A disaster
Of poverty

Shift doesn't *just* happen
Sometimes we make it happen
Conscious decisions
Prompting derision
The catalyst
Within our analysis
Leads to responsibility
Response-ability
We can choose
Our response

Pray and wait
For a miracle
Or
Pray
And transform

Water into wine
Pray and
Become a miracle

What do you do when the wine runs out?

Sometimes you take whatever bits and pieces you can find and combine them in ways they were never intended. Sometimes you transform them into something useful. Sometimes something beautiful. Sometimes both.

Sometimes you take useless scraps of cloth, perhaps remnants of some sewing disaster, and stitch them together, producing something both useful and beautiful as Kay Gould has done in making these wonderful quilts which will provide our Chapel with beauty and balance and remind us of the great themes of faith.

What do you do when the wine runs out?

Sometimes in the middle of economic collapse, in a place called Costa Mesa North of San Francisco, you contemplate the drastic change in worship tempo between Mardi Gras or Fat Tuesday and Ash Wednesday. And you contemplate Cana in Galilee where no wine becomes an abundance of the best wine and you create some Word Jazz!

And when your name is Jim Burklo you create "**Fat Tuesday Word Jazz**" (click on this link: http://tcpc.blogs.com/musings/open_christianity/ and scroll down to Feb. 27, 2009)

From Cana to Haiti.

From Cana to Calgary, Alberta.

What do we do when the wine runs out?

Is the church a stone jar filled with water for ritualistic purposes only, here to insure our worship is regular, on time not contaminated by worldly dirt?

Susan Beaumont (Getting to the Heart of the Matter, *Alban Weekly*, 2010-01-11, Number 285) is a consultant with the Alban Institute who works with congregations that are frequently stuck, where leadership is frustrated yet aware that something is holding the congregation back from achieving its full potential. She invites the congregation to share with each other stories of being stuck. In the stories there are clues for getting unstuck. She identifies three problematic story types that often sit at the heart of stuck congregations:

1. The story that illustrates where things went wrong in the past and how the congregation will never recover from that event
2. The story that illustrates a triumphant moment in the past, but memorializes that event in such a way that it limits the congregation's future
3. The story about being stuck in the present, casting the teller in a noble role and finding someone else to blame for the congregation's problems

Whether you think the United Church is stuck or not, or whether you think our congregation is stuck or not, I think it will be beneficial for us to do some of this

kind of story telling, perhaps at a gathering, perhaps as part of our Annual Meeting next month. I will take it to the board and see what happens.

As a church we have a story and are part of a larger story. It is a story of extravagant gifts given carefully and wisely, given from time=s beginning to its end. Given extravagantly that we might extravagantly give, extravagantly live.

There are miracles I certainly do believe in, and count on. The miracles we do together when we trust in the “more.”