

One night a few yrs ago I was on my iPad reading news when I heard my son stomping about mumbling about something ...so I asked him "what's matter?" he grumbled...."its book I am reading.....it's depressing"
"What's the title?" I asked "the Lion the Witch & the Wardrobe" "I've heard about it I replied... "what's so bad about it?" "Dad, I am not sure I want to finish this book...the lion....his name is Aslan...they just killed him off....what's left to the story...if the hero is already dead. He rolled his eyes at me when I suggested "Just turn page & see what happens." As I returned to my news I realized my advice....is easier said than done

So many stories of emptiness, tragedy & loss.....wars & disasters...u know litany...hard to turn page when all the news you read is bad....never mind the headlines...I'd bet there are plenty of stories of loss in this room today.....times when we're not sure we want to go on....stories life seems to have run out...so to speak...whether what runs out is love/life/job/dream...can get to point...it seeps into our soul...we get so stuck that we unable turn page...so to speak

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Speaking of life running out.....that is how today's Gospel begins...

It is one of the strangest stories in the Gospels....I say that it's strange....for several reasons...

1st of all....forgive me for being a bit irreverent....but while turning water into wine is nice ...

esp for Episcopalians who tend to enjoy a good party

when it comes to saving the world...this particular miracle just doesn't

seem to rank up there w/ feeding 5000.....or raising Lazarus from the dead.

And while for us...it doesn't seem like a big deal...for those involved...in that moment...it was everything

especially the poor groom whose job it was to provide the wine...w/ a blunder so bad...

it would easily have squelched any idea of a romantic honeymoon w/ his wife

not to mention what his new mother in law might do....

And then there all the questions it raises...questions like....just whose wedding is it....

& why is Jesus' mother so worked up about the wine.....

I mean if the party is over....then it's time to go home....and that is not always a bad thing

& just what did Mary expect Jesus to do.....a miracle....or run down to the local Piggly Wiggly

It is a strange story.....especially given that in John's Gospel....it is the first real story....

the first sign...John calls us....that reveals the glory of God.....

It is a strange story....a larger than life kind of story...& that may be the very point of it all

"I have come that you might have life"Jesus announced....."and have it abundantly."

& what Jesus announced.....is what he reveals in today's Gospel.

Never mind the wine....lets get back to real life.....Sometimes in life...for whatever reason ...
wine simply runs out....maybe its a friendship....or a marriage...maybe a job...
possibly a hurricane that wipes away life as you have known it.....or the death of someone we love

Wherever or whenever it is....it happens...when the joy& hope in life...runs out....
times in life when all our options are exhausted...all our efforts have failed...& we feel empty

What this Gospel reveals to us about God....is that emptiness.....is not the end....
in presence & power of Jesus...there is always more joy to be found...& more life to be lived
That in the presence & power of Jesus...there is more to life...than the # of days we live.....
the resume we build.....or our bank account
that there is joy to be found.....in the most empty & dreary times of life....
for what happened at that wedding...continues to happen....

Story of PB visit...both in PSJ & PC...sound...first days...silence.....then tears...last week a new sound.....laughter
There is something sacred about laughter...especially in times of emptiness.....
there is something about the mix of tears of sadness and tears of joy...that lifts our hearts....
In that moment...God broke into our midst...the emptiness of all lost...was suddenly filled w/ joy
for me it was a sign.....of God's glory....that there is more life to be lived....that can happen

But lets go a bit further...for there is something I saw this week I have never noticed before
Look one more time at our Gospel...that in order for the sign to happen.....
it involved the very people....who were already used up.....worn out.....and run down
its the very servants.....who probably made a mess of it all in the first place...thru which it begins

Just think about it.....what if you & I are those servants....
how often do we dismiss ourselves....because we have made a mess of it all...
how often do we miss out on God.....b/c we are all used up....worn out...and run down
how often do we dismiss ourselves...saying... "what good is my life in this world..."
Did you know the number one reason folks don't go to church.....they don't feel worthy.....

What if...that in order to find abundant life...it may just begin.....in giving ourselves for others
even when we may be asked to give....more than we think we can give...
time we are worn out...torn down....beat up.....and yet.....

How about pop up day care...water into wine...sign of Gods glory...in the wake of terrible storm

And then there was what happened to me right here in Apalach about 2 years ago.
I showed up for my visit & Martha asked if I would pay a visit on Dick Rushmore [permission]
who was too sick to get to church "last yr you confirmed him" she explained...
"since then....he was diagnosed w/ an aggressive form of cancer....
they've done all that they can do....."

So after church we made our way to his house.....Dick was sitting on the sofa....
effect of chemo was evident...he was weak...he tried to stand....I told him to please sit

One of the things I love about Apalach a place where people still maintain a certain level
of southern hospitality that seems lost on much of the world.....

“would you like something to drink.....no thanks...how about a cookie...no I’m fine
how was church.....seemed to go quite well.....”

The mood changed...as he leaned into the reality of his life “Well...I did not expect this”
the silence crept in...“Bishop”I have become use to that name now.....
“Bishop...I never knew how much I am loved.....I am surrounded by love.....”

Again there was silence...broken by a few sniffles....“It does not make sense does it?”
“No” he went on...“Amidst so much pain....only to know so much love”
So I laid my hands on his head....just as I had done a year ago.....
only it was a different type of journey for which I was praying for him.....
“May you continue to know you are surrounded by love....”

Life in a physical sense was running out... by his own confession he was full.....full of love....
& you are a part of what filled him up.....you were the sign....to see more in life.....love.

You see...you have it in you...the power to turn water into wine.....to help people know that in God....
there is always more life to live....more love to encounter.....and God will never lose us.

Jesus Christ offers us a gift...the gift of real life...of abundant life....a life that never runs out
...and as his followers...we are called to give that life away to others.....

A few days after Aaron’s moment of despair...he came running down the stairs....
w/ great surprise in his steps....“Dad...guess what...Aslan is alive”
You see....he returned to the story....he turned the page....to his great surprise...
there was more to the story...than he had ever imagined.
“I have come that you might have life”Jesus announced.....”and have it abundantly.”

This abundant life.... was revealed at first sign of Jesus....and it was revealed at his final sign
that day when it was not just wine that ran out...but his very life..... but then ...
on another third day.....to everyone’s great surprise...Jesus was alive.
God took the greatest nightmare of all...and our worst fear.....
that life itself will run out....and shows us.....there is more....

"I have come that you might have life"Jesus announced....."and have it abundantly."

How freeing...how healing...it is....to know that whatever emptiness we are feeling
whatever disappointment we are lugging around.....however we might @ wits end
that somewhere hidden in the midst of it...is the possibility...that life can be transformed
and it begins by giving to God....our empty souls...whatever that might mean for u

Begins again at this altar.....you are wiped clean...born again....and then YOU are given.....
the gifts of God....for the people of God....so you can become God's gift for the world...

In Jesus....life doesn't run out.....there is more of life to be found.....

May the miracle of that abundant life that Jesus gives...pour thru us...& fill us...& change us
until we become the very next sign....of God's glory....in this world....