

Right now there is nothing wrong with good wine. There will always be well-to-do vineyard owners and small vintners around the world who care about making good wine. There will always be people who get married and want the best refreshments they can afford for their guests. There is nothing wrong with good wine. However...right now many people are thinking more about good water than good wine. This is certainly the case for tens of thousands on the streets of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Days ago, a shift in the plates some eight miles beneath the earth's surface created an earthquake in the Caribbean nation of Haiti. The capitol city of Port-au-Prince was turned upside down. Like the tragedy in New Orleans, the human fight for survival is frightening. We have watched it on television; we have read about it online and in our newspapers. It is horrific when an eleven year old girl dies because her leg is broken. It is horrific when an orphanage is destroyed and the children are left to sleep and live by themselves. It is horrific when food and medicine sit on runways and in trucks and gangs of boys with big knives rule the streets. Today we might say our thoughts are more on water and medical supplies and doctors and nurses and adequate security for the people of Haiti than on the taste of good wine.

The taste of good wine has its place. It especially has its place in the middle of our greatest concern for our neighbors in Haiti. We find it in today's reading. The taste of good wine is the turn in the story. It is the steward, the chief server, who makes the discovery. He knows nothing about Jesus and Mary and six water jugs used for ritual ablutions. He knows nothing about this man from Nazareth. All he knows is the taste on his palate of good wine in that region. All he knows is the confusion created by a hitch in the amount of drink set aside. Until he dips his cup into the large jar to sample what some believe can alleviate the problem with a wine shortage, he knows nothing. It is his taste, his tongue, his appreciation for something better that tells him something amazing has happened. Where there is at first embarrassment and frustration, suddenly there is the best possible drink for the guests. He discovers it through his taste of what he thinks is water.

This story does not stand alone. It is not the sole piece of evidence that convinces everyone or anyone about Jesus of Nazareth. It is the first of the stories about signs. There are seven of them. John remembers disciples believing as a result of what happens here. Disciples who hear the banter going on between Mary and Jesus and who watch the face of the steward, they realize what happens. They look at the steward, then they look at Jesus. John says they believe. They may not be ready to die for Jesus. Nevertheless, they believe. At the end of this gospel, we are told again the reason for these stories. **“But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”** (John 20: 31) The discovery with the wine helps someone recognize Jesus. Recognizing Jesus and knowing who he is and believing him is the key to “life in his name.”

We have heard this before. There is another angle on what God is saying to us. Today we need something else. Someone has said weddings are accidents about to happen. They involve people who are so stressed, full of hope and anticipation and expectation and dreams. They are often expensive and over in an hour. Often, things happen. The last wedding I did was in Winston Salem for a friend of our family. The mother of the groom was on her way to the wedding. Somewhere in Winston Salem her car stopped in the middle of heavy traffic. I mean the car simply died. A city policeman came up to her window and said, “Lady, if you don't move your car pretty quickly, I will have the city tow your vehicle to our lot.” The mother said, “Officer, my son is getting married in a half an hour. Tow my car.” She got out, hailed a taxi and arrived at the wedding on time. I never learned what happened to her car. She arrived though and witnessed her son getting married.

The very first wedding I ever did in this church I was told to enter at the beginning of Pacabel's *Canon in D Minor*, a traditional wedding music piece. Always at weddings, ministers and organists have a signal that is our cue to enter with the groom and best man. On this particular day, Mark was not playing. Charlotte Sayre was the wedding coordinator. The organist played something and I had no clue what it was. If it was Pacabel's *Canon*, I did not recognize it. We are back in the entryway to the John Knox Chapel. I am trying to do a good job for the family and the church. I am looking at my watch. It is several minutes after the hour. Charlotte Sayre goes outside the sanctuary, down the walk, opens the door to the entryway into the chapel. Looking at little frustrated, she exclaims,

“GO!!” I went just as quickly as I knew how. The wedding took place. The couples got married. Somehow by the grace of God, everyone celebrated. Life is grand when there can be a celebration.

When Isaiah speaks to Israel from what we know as Isaiah 62, there is no celebration. The nation has been devastated. The people are lifeless. There are some who have been in exile for thirty years. Now they are being allowed to return home. There is a minority who have stayed in the land. They have lived in a country that has lost its identity. It has been an occupied place. There are some who know nothing about what has happened. They are the newest generation. Israel has been affected by its own stubborn sinfulness. Their city of Jerusalem has suffered. There has been no spiritual leadership for decades. The land of promise has lived in despair. Now...Isaiah announces the determination of God. We can hear it in these words. **“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch...You shall be called by a new name...You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord....You shall no more be termed Forsaken....so shall your God rejoice over you.”** (Isaiah 62 selected verses.)

This good news from Isaiah is the taste of good wine. It is only a taste. The solve in God’s message, the pride in what is going to be again, the “you” statements, the comparison with a young woman and man offer a hint of what is coming. The words do not change everything. They mark a beginning that we should notice.

Just now Haiti needs a new beginning. Our neighbors there are in a desperate situation. It is our privilege and responsibility to respond to neighbors in need. An important part of the life we share in Jesus Christ is realizing we are not at the center of the world. Jesus Christ is. When we learn of tragedy, as a church we respond in the wisest, most caring ways possible. Currently, our presbytery is mobilizing to support Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. One of the things we can do know is to give money through our presbytery. Another is to stay informed about what is happening there and learn what we can do to help. Another thing we can do is pray for those who are involved in the relief efforts. We can pray for doctors and nurses and organizers, for security people and pilots and a host of others we cannot imagine. We can pray that thirsty, hungry, desperate people will get precisely the good water and the warm food and the specific medical care they need.

There is still another angle on these lessons today. I was eating in a restaurant recently with Georgia. I look up and realized how natural it is that people of color are in the same restaurant with those who are considered Caucasian. It is almost embarrassing to point this out. My realization is a taste of good wine for me. It is a memory that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. came on the scene in the 1950s and spoke through his actions to the white community. He told us it was not right that we had schools that were called “separate but equal.” It was not right we sit in different parts of the same movie theatre. It is not right that we drink from different water fountains. Not right that when people travel, black and white people stay in different hotels. Not right that when we die, black and white are buried in different parts of a cemetery or perhaps in different cemeteries altogether. My observation has given me an abiding appreciation for Dr. King and for the threats and the jail and the beatings and the hatred and the assassination he endured so that people I don’t know can sit down in restaurants and taste good wine.

I want to tell you that on Sunday, April 26th, our Session will close our sanctuary so that we can worship with brothers and sisters at First United Presbyterian Church on Ladies Mile Road and North Avenue. We will have a plan about how we will travel there: either by bus or by car. Our Session is doing something so that we can live out “life in his name.” On Sunday, April 26th, we will worship together with First United Presbyterian Church, Dr. Willie Woodson’s congregation. After worship, we will sit down with them and share a covered-dish meal. You know Mary, the mother of Jesus, will not be there. Nor will any of the original twelve disciples be there. Jesus will be there though. Because of his amazing ability to change things, we will have a taste of good wine. Wine will not be served. I hope you hear what I am saying. Something will have changed. In our eating together and being together, we will experience the taste of good wine...in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.