

Water into wine - Models of Ministry

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

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It was at Alf Reynolds memorial service, that the eulogist referred to the passage that was our Gospel for this morning. Early in Alf's ministry, he had reached the point of frustration. It seemed that no matter how hard that he worked, nothing much seemed to happen. In one of those great Aha moments, God spoke to him and directed his thoughts to this passage. Who changed the water into wine asked God? Jesus, Alf replied. What was the job of the servants? God asked. To fill the water jars. Alf replied. That is all I ask of you, said God, I will do the rest. This passage provided Alf with a blue print for his subsequent ministry in God's name.

This morning, I would like to explore the images of ministry contained in this passage, and the lessons we might learn from it for our own ministry.

Let us begin -

Let us start with the lesson that Alf learnt, which changed his ministry. To often, we see ministry in terms of what we can do for God. We become focused in on activity, and we expect that God will honour it. Now, I do not wish to promote the idea that we do nothing, but that our focus must always begin with God. Changing water into wine is not a human activity, but part of the encounter of humanity and our human world with the divine. Each of us must start with the assumption that God is a God who will intervene in this world, and in many ways, that we are often called to get out of God's way. Do you see the miraculous hand of God in the world? Changing water into wine? Have you ever heard the testimony of a down and out who has turned their life around when they found Jesus? Is this not a miracle par excellence? Changed lives, like changed water are the hand of God intervening. Miracles- but do we see them here? One of the lies of Satan is that God has left all the work up to the church. But this is not what our epistle tells us. It is God is active, active through the spiritual equipping of his people. But do not be confused, it is God who is the Active agent.

Now think about it for a moment. What does it mean, if we are to speak in terms of God being involved?

It should change two things. First, we are to listen and find out what God wants to do... Do whatever he tells you says Mary to the servants.

If we are to take this seriously, then this will impact on our prayer life. All too often, we launch ourselves into pet projects - things that we wish to do and it is our prayer that is for God's blessing. This does not deny that these are Godly things, but often it is good that is the enemy of best. God may have other plans... Think about it for a minute. It is the insignificant acts that can make all the difference. The impact of Billy Graham on the world cannot be denied, but who was it that told him about Jesus?? Who was it who showed him the way, the truth, and the life? We often see ministry in terms of being another Billy Graham, but do we see it in terms of influencing one life. (Perhaps only one). Unless we are listening to God's voice, how

can we see what it is that he wants us to do? Have you heard it recently, or have you crowded God out with your own busyness, even religious busyness?

Second, it should change our attitude to all that we do. The mundane work of filling water jars had no glamour. It had no obvious reward. Even at the end Jesus just told them - draw some and take it to the steward. But it was in that obedience that something happened. Often the church is ineffective, because there is a reluctance to do the very things that need to be done. Now I am not talking about maintenance or dishes, but I must admit that I am yet to find the place in scripture that excuses any Christian from actively being involved. I am yet to find the part where Christianity is described as a part time occupation. Yet if we were honest and look around the Anglican church, few are obedient, and perhaps this is where we are in trouble. We have already been told what to do. In scripture, and no doubt regularly from this pulpit, but do we? God cannot act without our obedience.

The second image of ministry that I wish to look at is that of reason for action. Jesus acted to meet the immediate need. The wine had run out. As we read through the scriptures, we find that Jesus reacts to need. Now there is nothing spiritual about wine. But it was wine which they needed. Indeed, it was not even those in need of the wine, the guests, that seem to grasp God in action - it was the servants and the disciples. We are not in the business of social work - meeting needs, but the essence of the Gospel, is that God cares, that God so loved the world. Needs are not the reason for action, but the opportunity. We have a tendency to separate the secular and the sacred, and we can find ourselves cataloguing secular and sacred activities. As a God-person, we are called as much to help the lost tourist in the street with their map, as we are to help the lost soul to find Jesus. Somehow, we must take on the character of God, meeting needs as well as proclaiming the Gospel. Read the story of the sheep and the goats. What distinguished them is not the faith they professed, but how they lived it out. God asks us to care for others - not just to look for spiritual need, but to engage the whole person for Jesus.

In hospital in my CPE training, I caught a glimpse of how this worked. There was a man whose child was ill, and he waited in the waiting room. Over a number of shifts, we all encountered him, but no one could get through to him. On the night that I was on, there was another lady waiting concerning another patient. She had been there for hours, and in the course of chatting when I entered the waiting room, it became apparent that she needed a cup of tea. I offered to get it for her and she accepted and we had a cup together and then she left the room. This other man whom none of us could reach was watching - He spoke to me for about half an hour.

Let us not be afraid of seeking to meet the needs of others, for we will not know where it will lead.

Finally, our passage has something to say about setting. When speaking about ministry, images of ministry are often seen in terms of the formal activity of the church or Christians. Preacher in a pulpit. Chaplain at the Hospital Bed. Youth Group devotion, Missionary Meeting. Altar Call. Evangelistic Rally. Ministry is about the church in action, and we see ministry in these terms. To do the God things, we must take on the God role. Ministry is in those things which take place in the special religious world. We often these days try to separate Jesus into the Religious world away from the worker day world, from the everyday world, yet the essence of the

incarnation - the event that we celebrate each Christmas is the word becoming flesh. The son of God entering our world as one of us. Jesus did not enter a religious world, but was part of the normal mundane world. Like his father, Joseph, we assume that he worked in a carpenter's workshop in Nazareth before taking up the itinerant life of a teacher.

Our story is set in an unlikely setting for ministry opportunity. Jesus had gone, as many others had, to a celebration. It was a marriage, and then as now, a good time could be had by all. Hardly the place where God would enter (after all, they were as the text implies, times of drunkenness and carousing). But this is the point of the incarnation. It is not about the sinner coming to God, but rather God going to the sinner. God met us where we are, he did not demand that we seek him out.

At Cana, Jesus was part of the human world. It was nothing special, and yet the presence of Jesus made it so. And this made the opportunity for something to happen.

In this story then the implication is not about the setting up a religious opportunity, but rather the concept of making the opportunity out of the ordinary every day. This is the true meaning of great commission - Matthew 28:18 - Go into all the world and make disciples, baptising them in the name of..... How many times have you heard sermons preached on this verse? **GO** into all the world... It is the missionary call isn't it. It is the call to **go**. I wouldn't be surprised if it hasn't been quoted at least once at the summer school. - Perhaps you may be surprised if I say that this is Eisegesis - reading into the text what we want it to say.

Now I am not interested in trying to blind you with scholarship, but if we read this passage in the Greek, we find the emphasis is slightly different. "Going into the world. **Make** disciples. Or as I like to translate it. As you go about your daily life in this world, Make disciples along the way. Or perhaps even in more expanded form: As you go about your daily life in this world, live out your life in such a way that you Make disciples along the way. You see it is not about a missionary call, but about what each of us ought to do as a matter of course.

In our Christian walk, the call is to make disciples as we go through life. It is where it is that life takes us is our place of activity. Not a special mission field, but in our own world.

Changing water into wine is God's business, but our calling is to go through life to fill the water jars. Take a moment now to ask God to show you the water jars that need filling.

AMEN