

## **Le chaim**

John 2:1-11

January 17, 2010

Do you believe in magic? Do you believe in miracles? Is there a difference?

John reports that this was Jesus' first miracle: turning one hundred and fifty gallons of plain water into one hundred and fifty gallons of the finest wine. Pretty impressive, huh? I'll bet the neighbors know who they want to invite to their next big party!

Just think of the possibilities! Think of the buzz this could create around Jesus, the attention it could garner for him and his message. A few more miracles like this one and Jesus will have all the audience he could ever hope to reach. That's what we need, don't we? A miracle, some magic, something spectacular to bring them in.

Is this what John means when he says that in Cana in Galilee, Jesus revealed his glory? Does he mean that Jesus revealed his glory by showing a miracle, some magic, something truly spectacular? That doesn't sit well with me. Does it sit well with you?

There are people, believers, who think of Jesus this way, as a kind of magician, wonderworker, lucky charm, a heavenly vending machine for whatever it is their hearts desire. But that runs contrary to so much of what I know about Jesus, the Jesus who calls us to lives of sacrifice and service, who calls us to give ourselves away in love to each other as he did, who tells us to expect suffering in this life as we choose to follow him and who makes it real by suffering alongside us.

And yet, we are talking about glory, about something brilliant, stunningly beautiful, marvelous. When we say the Word became a human being and lived among us, when we say we saw his glory, we mean we see God in him -- tangibly, visibly. Jesus is more than a teacher, more than an example of the right way to live. He is ... the glorious One, the Son of the Most High God, the Lord.

So what do we see of God in Jesus? What is glory? That's our task in this season of Epiphany, to think together Sunday by Sunday about the nature of the glory revealed in Jesus. So what do we learn from this event in Cana, from the performance of Jesus first miracle, from John's testimony that there, at this wedding, Jesus revealed his glory? Is it the glory of a magical spectacle, or is there a difference between magic and miracle? What is the difference between magic and miracle?

A magician is eager. A magician craves an audience. But Jesus is reluctant. He tells his mother,

*You must not tell me what to do.*

She doesn't tell him what to do, but she leaves the door open, telling the servants,

*Do whatever he tells you.*

Magic is all about performance, drama, spectacle. But Jesus' "performance" is entirely lacking in showmanship. "Fill these jars with water," he says, and it is done. At least the miracle is discovered to be done once the water is drawn off and taken to the steward for tasting. It is all so simple, so understated. The performance of the miracle is quite undramatic. There are no "magic words," no dramatic gestures, no waving of a wand.

Magic is all about attracting attention, winning acclaim for the magician's extraordinary powers. But who gets credit for the miracle in Cana? The bridegroom does!

*Everyone else serves the best wine first, and after the guests have drunk a lot, he serves the ordinary wine. But you have kept the best wine until now!*

Magic is all about personal gain: making a profit, making a name for oneself, achieving fame. But a miracle addresses the needs of another. It serves God's purpose.

OK. Time out. This is where I have a problem with this story. What purpose of God is served by turning water into wine? How is giving some partygoers an extra round of drinks doing God's work?

Well, what is God's purpose? What does Jesus reveal of who God is and what God intends? Jesus says, elsewhere in the gospel of John,

*I have come in order that you might have life -- life in all its abundance!*

It's all about life! Abundant and full and overflowing life! *Le chaim!* To life! The wine provides an exclamation point to this celebration, to this celebration of the goodness and richness and fullness of the life God gives. Jesus' miracle is his wedding gift to the bride and groom. *Le chaim!*

Turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana was, according to John's gospel, Jesus' first miracle. According to John's gospel, what was his last? It was raising Lazarus, calling Lazarus out of the tomb in which he had been buried for four days and restoring him to life. To life!

That is the meaning of miracle from the first to the last: life, life in all its richness and fullness. That's the meaning of restoring sight to a blind man, giving mobility to a lame man, feeding a crowd of hungry people, raising a dead man to life.

Actually, raising Lazarus was not the last miracle recorded in John's gospel. Do you know what was the last miracle? Resurrection. God raising Jesus to life, not like Lazarus who would die again one day, but Jesus raised to life, for ever, never to die again.

Jesus' resurrection is the ultimate miracle, a miracle that is both sign and reality. It is the sign of God's power to bring life out of death, new life out of deadness, in all its forms. And it is the reality of life -- human life, bodily life, earthly life, this life -- made new, made eternal. The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith, the foundation of our belief in what God has done and in what God will do. Our faith is based on this miracle.

Because that is the last and most important difference between magic and miracle. Magic is illusion. Miracle is real!

We spend a lot of time looking for magic. We seek the tools, the techniques, the gurus, the knowledge, the "spells" that will give us the right body image or the right look or the right attitude, that will unleash our hidden powers or unlock wisdom's hidden secrets, all for the purpose of getting what we want -- money or recognition or security or happiness or love.

Isn't that why we diet? Isn't that why we buy new clothes? Isn't that why we consume so many pharmaceuticals? Isn't that why we line our bookshelves with the latest self-help titles? Isn't that why we watch Oprah? Because we are looking for a little magic in our lives?

But magic is illusion. The only thing magic is good for is to make money for the magician.

Miracle is real. What you need is a miracle.

John reports that when Jesus revealed his glory at that wedding in Cana, his disciples believed in him. Did they believe in his power to change ordinary water into the finest wine?

Or did they believe, because of what they had seen of Jesus' glory, in his power to change them? Did they believe in his power to transform ordinary people, like them, into extraordinary people, men and women filled too with glory, glory revealed in their gifts of truth and grace and love to each other?

Do you believe in miracles? Do you believe in what Jesus can make of you?