

Water into Wine

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

13 October, 2024

Children's Talk: Saving the Best for Last

- Here's how life feels sometimes: we have some good things, we use them up, and then all we have is things that aren't so good.
- The letdown after a birthday or a holiday
- When you've used up all your screen time and only chores are left to do
- But that's not always how life works
- The Word though tells a story of Jesus making it so that people could have the best stuff last!

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."

Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!"

This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days. (John 2:1-12)

- The master of the feast was surprised! The wine Jesus made at the end of the feast, was the best!
- Sometimes, things start out good but then get worse over time; and we even feel like that's inevitable; but the Lord can make it so that things not only get better, but that they get better even than they were at the beginning.

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Just yesterday I had the pleasure of officiating a baptism. Now today we will have Holy Supper at the end of this service. The coming together of these two sacraments, one after the other, is actually quite appropriate: there is a close connection between them. In the Word they serve as kind of bookends to Jesus' ministry as well: the Gospels begin with Jesus' baptism and then end with the Last Supper immediately before the crucifixion and resurrection. Baptism commemorates a beginning; Holy Supper commemorates a conclusion. In fact, to understand the meaning of Holy Supper we first have to understand the meaning of baptism, and how the one leads into the other.

Baptism is an introduction. It was instituted before the Lord had even publicly come onto the scene. John baptised in the wilderness, preparing people for the coming of the Lord:

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord;

Make His paths straight.'"

Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. (Matthew 3:1-6)

John prepared the way for the Lord's coming, and he did so by preaching to the people and baptising them with water in the Jordan river. We continue to do the same even today: in the baptism ceremony water is poured over the head, and the baptized individual is asked the most basic of questions about faith: Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you accept Him in His Word? Do you commit to shunning evil and doing good? Baptism is extraordinarily basic. If someone can

affirmatively answer these three questions, they are ready to be baptized. All the complications and details can come later. It is an introduction. This is so much so the case that even infants, who cannot answer these questions for themselves, can be baptized.

But by that same token, baptism is not enough in itself. It represents only the beginning, not the end. John himself taught that something more was needed:

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matthew 3:11)

The water of baptism would not suffice. This is because the water represents truth. Truth, on its own, does not do anything for someone. It is something preparatory. We don't go to school for the sake of getting a degree; the whole point is that the education has prepared you for an occupation or for a way of life. We don't take training courses for the fun of it (usually); we do it so that we can develop a skill that we can use. We don't exercise because exercise is fun (ok, some of us might) but we exercise either to prepare for a race, or to have good health in the other parts of our lives. The preparation is not the point. The same thing is true of truth: it is essential that we learn the basic truths about the Lord, our relationship with Him, how to live a good life, the Word, heaven and hell, and so on; but learning any of things is not for its own sake. The point is for how we are going to live our lives.

The fulfilment of this purpose is represented in the Holy Supper. Holy Supper is the continual commitment to carrying out the promises of baptism, a commitment to living a certain way, not just thinking a certain way. The teachings of the New Church compare them to two gates, the first of which leads on to the second:

By baptism, which is the first gate, every Christian is let into and introduced into what the church teaches from the Word respecting the other life, all of which teaching forms the means whereby man can be prepared for and led to heaven. The second gate is the holy supper, by which every man who allows

himself to be prepared and led by the Lord is admitted into and introduced into heaven. There are no other universal gates. (*True Christian Religion* §721)

The differences between these two concepts, of preparing and then actually doing what you prepared for, can be seen in the differences between the two ceremonies: In baptism there is only liquid, and that liquid is water; in Holy Supper, there is food and liquid, and the liquid is special, wine. In baptism, the water is applied to the skin; in Holy Supper the bread and wine are actually taken into and absorbed by the body. In baptism, the water stands for something *from* the Lord; in Holy Supper, the bread and wine *are* the Lord's very flesh and blood, in other words, the presence of the Lord Himself directly in your life, not just something from Him; and baptism is (generally) done only once, while Holy Supper is repeated again and again throughout a lifetime.

We could take this in any number of ways, but I want to focus on the difference between the water and the wine for the remainder of this sermon. The water of baptism, as I said before, stands for truth. In the Holy Supper, the wine also stands for truth or wisdom, and the bread stands for goodness or love. At baptism there is just water: just the learning of the truth in an external way; but in holy supper, bread is added, representing the addition of love to the truth. This is a useful way of thinking about truth and goodness, or of faith and charity: they are two separate things that support each other. You start with truth, then add goodness or love to it, and that's what it's all about.

But there is a more intricate connection: goodness is not just added, truth is supposed to *become* something more; the water of baptism is actually replaced with wine in the Holy Supper. While the wine does represent truth still, it also represents truth that has become charity. Truth is supposed to transform into charity, like a

caterpillar becoming a butterfly; like water becoming wine. The Teachings of the New Church describe how this transformation takes place:

Spiritual goodness is truth that has become goodness; for truth becomes goodness when the man lives according to it, for it then passes into the will, and from the will into act, and becomes of the life; and when it becomes of the life it is no longer called truth but goodness. (*Secrets of Heaven* §5595)

The truth isn't the same as it was; by adding love, the known truth has become the lived truth, and so is a fundamentally different thing. If you add love, or rather the feeling of love, but don't let the known truth be put into practice, something is missing. The water must become wine.

You first learn a true idea; and then you start caring about people; but now you just have an idea plus a feeling; the idea needs to be translated into action; only then has the truth been transformed into charity. Let's look at a few simple examples.

- The idea: family is good; the feeling: I really genuinely want to be connected with them! The necessary action? Picking up the phone and texting or calling.
- The idea: putting time into my spiritual life matters; the feeling: wow, I really need to connect with the Lord, I can feel the lack of that! The necessary action? Making time for the Word, prayer, etc.
- The idea: I should share the blessings I've been given in life with others; The feeling: wow, some people really have it rough, I never realized! The necessary action? I'm going to put aside some time and money every week to support a local charity.

When truth is lived, it no longer looks like "truth" because it is no longer intellectual; it is merely a reflection of goodness or love. Much as a pane of glass that is clear and clean is invisible, serving only to reveal what lies on the other side. The commitment we make in Holy Supper is not only that we will receive goodness and truth from the Lord; but that we will allow ourselves to be motivated into action by that goodness,

and that we will live the truth to the best of our ability, so that what once was lifeless will full of life, and the promises of baptism will no longer be mere promises, but an ongoing way of life.