

**“There are more things in heaven and earth”  
1 Corinthians 12:1-11  
John 2:1-12  
Brentwood First Presbyterian Church  
The second Sunday after Epiphany, 1/14/07  
Reverend Michael J Magee, MD**

**Introduction**

Today we are talking about Jesus’ first public miracle. We are talking today about how miracles happen. In Shakespeare’s play, Hamlet says to his friend, “There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” Someone picked up on this, and applied it to miracles. This writer says, “There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our *theology*.”

**We invite Jesus**

Someone invites Jesus to a wedding party. The host does not invite him because he is special. He has not begun his ministry yet, and no one but his family knows he is special. Some of the sources that did not make it into the Bible say that Jesus’ cousin, the daughter of his mother’s sister, was the bride at this wedding. Maybe that is why his mother is bossy. Maybe that is why she asks Jesus to help with the wine. The amount of wine they need implies to me there are between 600 and 1200 people at the wedding, probably everybody in the village of Cana, plus some. Cana is an insignificant village 10 miles north of Nazareth, that is, 10 miles north of nowhere, sort of like the village our Presbytery went on a mission trip to this summer. Whenever you have a party, you always want to invite someone who to be the life of the party. Someone who can keep the conversation going. Someone who can come up with party games. Someone who can turn lemons into lemonade. Or water into wine. The host does not know Jesus is such a person. The host does not know that God in Jesus has the gift of working miracles.

Because Jesus has not begun his ministry yet. He is incognito. Like the three wise men 30 years earlier, he himself is a stranger bearing unknown gifts.

We live in a world of two economies. The economy of Wall Street, and the economy of God. The economy of budget deficits, and the economy of God's abundance. The economy of saving money for a rainy day, and the economy of doing something about the 32,000 children who die every day of hunger. The economy of not enough to go around, and the economy of opening our eyes to the truth of God's abundance. So we give the economy of God a try. The starving children are no longer "them." The children become "us." In the economy of God, we welcome the stranger. We share what we have to welcome the stranger. And the stranger becomes one of "us." No longer one of "them." One of "us." You see, when we welcome a stranger, and when we invite the stranger to come back again, we invite Jesus. We invite the economy of God.

There is a book entitled "90 minutes in heaven." I recommend it. The author has a near death experience. He says a paramedic pronounces him dead, and he is not resuscitated until 90 minutes later. After resuscitation, he remembers how he spent the 90 minutes. He spends his time in heaven shaking hands and hugging all the special friends and relatives who have died before him. He calls this 90 minutes, what is like the passing of the Joy of Christ in our worship, he calls it 90 minutes of heaven. I think when we pass the Joy of Christ we experience what heaven is like. Three minutes of heaven. When we have visitors, we do more than greet them during those three minutes. We greet them in the parking lot. We sit beside them during worship. Yes, we greet them during the Passing of the Joy of Christ. But God calls us to stretch beyond ourselves. God calls us to love each other, including the stranger. To love and embrace each other. We feel good

afterwards. We can do this. I think God calls us, all of us, to greet visitors at the door. To sit beside them in worship. To visit them in their homes on Sunday afternoon. We can do this. God asks us to welcome visitors. For the introverts among us it is more of a stretch to reach beyond our comfort zone. To reach beyond our pew. But with God's help we can do this. Because I believe this is the vision of the Lord of our heart. But welcoming strangers exacts a toll. Sometimes this makes us tired. Sometimes it depletes our resources.

### **Our resources run low**

I am quoting from "The Storyteller's Companion to the Bible."

"This was the biggest event of the year in the little town of Cana. That nice Rabinowitz boy and that sweet Goldberg girl were getting married. The party would last for a week. Everybody who was anybody would be there. Well, the big day came and everybody was there. Even Jesus and the disciples showed up. And Mary, too, Jesus' mother. Before long, Mary happened to hear one of the servants whisper to the wine steward that they were almost out of liquid refreshment. Now there are some things in life you just do not want to do. You don't want to insult a 300 pound biker named Tank. You don't want to leave the house with dirty underwear. And you do not want to run out of liquid refreshment at a Jewish wedding. The bad news began to spread. Mary walked over to Jesus and said quietly, 'Son, it's time to quit playing Clark Kent and do your stuff.' Jesus said something like, 'Mom, don't involve me in this. You know I don't do parlor tricks.' But Jesus was on the spot. Oh well, maybe this was as good a time as any to get started. He said to the servants, 'You see those 6 empty water jars? Fill them up with water and lets see what happens.'"

Look at the stock market crashes of 1929 and 1988. Look at all the chapter 11's and chapter 13's. Look at all the churches which fold because they focus on what their budget can afford instead of focusing on the economy of God. Sometimes we forget that God saves. That God will provide. God did not just create the universe and then take a long holiday. God cares for us, and puts everything within our reach. There really is enough. The fact that 32,000 children die of starvation every day is a problem of poor distribution of the resources God has provided, not God's lack of concern. It is humanity's lack of concern. It is not that God does not care. It is that humanity, though aware, is not concerned enough to do something about it. We look at the news and the statistics with detachment, not with compassion. It is humanity, not God, who ignores Jesus' admonition to see Jesus in and be Jesus to other people. It is humanity, not God, who ignores Jesus' admonition to go out into all the world making disciples. That is the main message from the Bible, that God loves us, and God provides for us. In Jesus, God puts on the clothes of humanity. So we have permission to put on Jesus' clothes of service to others. And it is our honor to do so. Those others are not just those with the same education or income as we have. The others are not just for those whose skin is one color or another. The others are not just for those who are drug free. The others are not just those who vote for one political party or the other, or speak one language or the other. The others are all of God's children. You and me, and all our visitors. And all those who *would* visit our church if we were inviting enough. Yes, God's economy provides for making our church an inviting place to visit. It makes our church an inviting place to which to return.

But you might say we have to buy extra grape juice, and extra bread for communion so we have enough. We have to step outside our comfort zone and shake hands and go visit a stranger. We give up TV time on Sunday afternoon. This is too much of a drain on our energy.

But this is the least of our financial and energy expenditures. How do we appeal to the 30 % of unchurched Brentwood who are Baby Boomers? And to the 30% of unchurched Brentwood who are Gen X and Gen Ys? And to 30% of unchurched Brentwood who are children and teenagers. These folks are not looking for denominationalism. They are not looking for boring sermons and organ music. They are not looking for “Onward Christian Soldiers Marching as to War.” What are they looking for? Studies show Baby Boomers and Gen X and Gen Ys are looking for spirituality, not religion. But what does this mean? They are looking for video clips in worship and small band ensembles. They are looking for worship services with Taize music and healing oil. They are looking for a variety of music including traditional, Gospel, and praise music. They are looking for a memorial prayer garden, a prayer labyrinth, and a prayer closet. They are looking for Jesus in the face of the sick, the hungry, and the oppressed. How do we bring the sick, the hungry, and the oppressed into our church? How do we bring in folks in assisted living and nursing homes? How do we can bring in Hispanics living on Nolensville Road for ESL classes? How do we bring in children from the TN Baptist Children’s Home to Vacation Bible School this summer? We purchase a used van. When invite the strangers into our midst, we invite Jesus. All of these things we need to be inviting are a drain on our financial and spiritual resources. But as the Psalm says, we take refuge under the shadow of God’s wings. God’s concern and compassion are deep,

and reach as high as the clouds. God will provide. We invoke not the economy of Wall Street, where the budget drives the mission and ministry of our church. Instead, we invoke the economy of God, where mission and ministry drive the budget. But some say this is too idealistic. Some say it is like throwing pennies to heaven. Some might say this is too much too quickly.

Martin Luther King was accused of moving too quickly in 1963, when he was arrested for leading demonstrations against segregation laws. I visited the King museum in Birmingham this past July. In his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” he addresses the accusations that his actions were unwise and untimely. He writes, “In the midst of blatant injustices against the Negro, I have watched white churches stand on the sideline and merely mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities.” Yes Martin Luther King had a dream. And 43 years later, his dream has almost been realized. But his point is that too often churches are taillights instead of headlights. He said the time for action to correct injustice is now, not sometime in the future. On his entry into Jerusalem, Jesus weeps over the city because it did not recognize the time of God’s visitation. I believe Jesus and Martin Luther King have something to tell us about when is the right time for switching from the economy of Wall Street to the economy of God. Jesus and Martin Luther King see the church as the institution established to bring to the earth love, freedom, and peace. Jesus and MLK have a dream. A dream that all of us will overcome our inertia. That we no longer suffer from paralysis by analysis, and have a bias toward action. I believe Jesus and Martin Luther King tell us that God’s time is not sometime in the future. That God’s time is now.

**The stranger restores us**

Jesus tells the servants to fill 6 almost empty water jars up to the brim, the jars containing the water used to wash dusty feet and hands before entering and before eating. Each stone jar holds 25 gallons, for a total of 150 gallons. And when they pour the water into goblets, what comes out is not water but fine wine. In the language of coffee, my favorite beverage, what we have here is Starbucks freshly ground, not that instant stuff. And there is more than enough for all the guests.

Why should Jesus begin his ministry with conversion of water into wine? Why not begin his ministry with helping the blind to see and the cripple to walk? Why not begin his ministry by raising Lazarus from the dead? Is this cheap parlor trick supposed to convince us that he is the Son of our creator God? All of us know the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 with 7 loaves and 2 fish. It is a story of a miracle, yes. But more importantly, it is also an enacted parable of God's abundance. With only 7 loaves and 2 fish, Jesus feeds 5000 and has leftovers. The story of changing water to wine is the beverage equivalent of the feeding of the 5000. I believe both the feeding of the 5000 and the Cana wedding events are enacted parables telling us of God's abundance. Both events are enacted parables revealing God's economy. Not the economy of Wall Street. God's economy.

As Jesus feeds the 5000, and provides for the beverage of choice at the Cana wedding, so God provides us with spiritual nourishment. Jesus calls us to go out into all the world making disciples. Doak, Gladys, Mary, Linda, and two of our visitors from last week, Tammy Stringer and Tammy Barber, did just this when we all showed up at the soup kitchen on 16<sup>th</sup> Ave and Grand this past Friday. We fed 150 homeless with spaghetti, broccoli casserole, cookies, and milk. It felt good to do this. We saw the face of

Jesus in their faces. But we also see the face of Jesus in strangers. In visitors to our church. Two visitors from last week came to the soup kitchen with us. I believe God calls us to meet visitors in the parking lot. To sit with them during worship. To get their names and addresses, and to go and visit them on Sunday afternoon. Studies show that one in three of our visitors who we greet, if we do these things, will become members of our church. They are the angels among the strangers who visit us. All we have to do is make them feel welcome. If we do not, these angels will go to a place where they are welcomed.

Someone who is not a member of our church sees we need some hymnals, and makes a donation. A member of our church hears about this donation, and wants to make her own donation toward the hymnals. Someone outside our church hears we need a new sign, and tells me he wants to make a donation to our new sign. And it goes on and on. Such is the economy of God. Not the economy of Wall Street, where the budget drives the mission and ministry. The economy of God, where mission and ministry drive the budget, not the other way around. When we are open to the economy of God, miracles occur.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus at the soup kitchen and on the face of the visitor. Greeters in the parking lot, three minutes in heaven, and home visits. Creative worship, prayer gardens, and prayer closets. Hymnals, vans, and the economy of God. We are open to the action of God's Spirit, and a miracle occurs. We overcome inertia and paralysis by analysis, and replace it with a bias toward action.

We use the gifts God has given us. As Apostle Paul says, “To each of us is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ... All these (gifts) are activated by the ... Spirit.” We go out into all the world, seeing Jesus in the hungry, the sick, the oppressed, but *also* in the *stranger*. In the process, we make disciples of all nations. God gives us the strength to step outside our comfort zone. To compensate for introversion, so we can invite, greet, and welcome our visitors. Visitors who, like the three wise men and Jesus at Cana, are strangers bearing gifts. Visitors who are Jesus incognito. So what is our next step? Jesus says, “You see those 6 empty water jars? Fill them up with water and lets see what happens.”

To God be the Glory, Hallelujah, and Amen.

**Benediction: As Martin Luther King said, “I have a dream.” Go out into all the world and be the miracle.**