



Hear the Word

from Pastor Paul E. Hoffman

Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Second Sunday after Epiphany

January 20, 2019

John 2:1-11

You might say it's a story of resurrection. It seems like a story about water turned to wine, but I think there's more. I think it's a story about new life, new ways of seeing. A story of audacious generosity. A new way of being that this Jesus, light of the world, brings to us all.

But first: this story about resurrection. An equally compelling tale of resurrection and audacious unexpected generosity. And it happened at – of all places -- the Everett Denny's.

A seventy-ish grandmother and her six-year old grandson went to Denny's for breakfast a few weeks ago. When breakfast arrived, he asked if he could say grace. They bowed their heads and he started in: God is good. God is great. Thank you for the food, and I would even thank you more if Nana gets us ice cream for dessert, even though it's just breakfast. And liberty and justice for all. Amen.

Along with the chuckles from the other customers seated close by, a woman remarked, *That's the trouble with the world today. Kids today want everything and they don't even know how to pray. Imagine! Asking God for ice cream at breakfast.*

Hearing this, the little boy burst into tears and asked his Nana, Did I do it wrong? Is God mad at me?

An elderly gentleman approached the table. He heard it all, too. He winked at the little boy and said *I happen to know that God thought that was a GREAT prayer. Really?* the little boy asked. *Cross my heart,* the man replied. Then, in a theatrical whisper, he added leaning his head toward the woman, *Too bad she never asks God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes.*

It's about as diverse a crowd as the one John sketches out in his scene at the wedding at Cana in Galilee, the sight of Jesus' first miracle. Just like the folks at Denny's had their antenna go up when they heard a little boy praying, just so ours should go up when John begins, "on the third day..." In case you haven't been paying attention, fascinating things happen on the third day in the Bible. Transformative things. Resurrection things. Whenever you hear, "on the third day..." put on your seat belts. Something amazing is about to happen.

Like the little cluster at Denny's, there are all sorts of diverse characters in this amazing story John tells. There's a bride and there's a groom, although they play an amazingly small part. There's Jesus, of course. One expects Jesus around in a resurrection story, right? There's a rather rare appearance by Mary, and in a role we wouldn't expect. A little pushier than the retiring mother by the manger, or the amazed young woman in Luke's annunciation story. There's a wine steward and some servants. And there's a crowd. All of us. All of us standing around at the wedding feast, just waiting to see what happens next.

What happened next at Denny's was that the grandmother bought her little guy ice cream at the end of breakfast. He stared at it for a moment, and then did something no one in that Denny's will ever forget. He got up, picked up his sundae, and walked over to where the lady who'd eye-rolled him was sitting. With an innocent smile he told her, *Ma'am this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes.*

You might say that he was the bearer of the resurrection. He was the bringer of new life. He was unpredictably generous.

John says, *Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory...* You get the impression that there is more to come. That this is not the end of what Jesus can do. For that couple. For their guests, for us, for the world. This was the first of his signs. You might say that he was the bearer of the resurrection. He was the bringer of new life. He starts his ministry with audacious, long-lasting generosity.

Ma'am this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes.

Boom. Just like that. All things are new. Changed. Transformed. The power of forgiveness... The courage of forgiveness... The audacity of giving... It changes everything.

It seems like the shortage of wine at a wedding feast could be a bit of a crisis. But more importantly, it points to the bigger crises with which we are all called to navigate in this amazingly troubled and complex world of ours. But with the simplest of gestures, Jesus changes a crisis into an opportunity – he takes a party that is quickly dying and brings new life to it. The woman at Denny's in Everett was trying to stamp the life out of that little boy, too. But in his amazing act of kindness, he brings new life as well. That audacity generosity. It changes everything.

Might I remind you that we're only in the second chapter of John's Gospel at this point. This is just the beginning. Who knows what is going to happen next? And where this story is leading?

The answer to that is – no one. We might know where John's Gospel story is headed. Cross and resurrection, right? In 21 short chapters John's story of Jesus gives witness to a whole new world: self-giving love, the miracle of resurrection.

It's like the little Gospel play at Denny's. That little fellow gave witness to a whole new world. To audacity of giving. To the miracle of resurrection.

Where this story is leading is, in large part, up to us. How will we bring life where death is seemingly reigning? How will we bring the miracle of transformation where someone or something is doing their level best to suck all the air out of the room? How will we bring Epiphany light in a world that seems to keep on getting darker and darker every single day? How? By bringing the audacity of offering ourselves. By being living witnesses to the miracle of resurrection.

That's now it's done.

In the name of the Father, and of the (✠) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.