

Sermon Jan 16.22 Sermon Series through Epiphany: "I believe" by Pastor Kit Greaves

Pray

What does it mean to say I believe? As we begin this Sermon Series, do realize this question has nothing to do with superstar musician from Stratford Ontario named Justin Bieber or Tim Horton's current promotion of Tim Bits called Tim Biebs. Nothing what's so ever. We would invite you instead to the possibility of feeding your soul and challenging your mind in this series I believe.

What difference does it make to say I believe? And why did Jesus turn water into wine?

Last Summer, the Rev Sarah Coakley was leading a spiritual retreat with members of SSJE, the Society of St John the Evangelist, a community of Anglican monks, near Boston. Rev Sarah challenged the members to take seriously the risks with which they were being invited to wrestle on a daily basis, as well as to renew their willingness to take risks.

One of the greatest risks, of course, is the risk of belief. Many would admit that belief is a risky thing, especially when so much around us contradicts the very things we claim; this morning's Gospel for example: water cannot turn into wine, can it? not just any wine but the best, VQA wine, instantly! As the SSJE Superior and a fellow Trent University grad James Koester writes, "belief is not about claims being proven true. Our word 'belief' comes to us from an earlier word meaning confidence in a person or thing, holding something dear, to love, or putting our trust in someone or something."

I was reminded while conducting funerals over the last number of months (Valerie Marshall, Pat King, Dave Rodway, Margie Husky, Des Webster, Mary Aldridge, Lois Adam, Diane Cripps, our dog Buddy) of a prayer we often recite, that "we may be gathered to our ancestors, having the testimony of a good conscience, in the communion of the catholic Church, in the confidence of a certain faith, in the comfort of a religious and holy hope, in favour with you, our God, and in perfect charity with all..."

To say I believe is about having a *confidence* in a certain faith; certain not as in 'particular' but as in 'firm.' This faith, is not, as I see it, a private opinion. It is rooted in something larger than me - as the Earth is larger than the Moon, planet Jupiter is larger than 1300 Earths or the Sun larger than 1000 Jupiters, or John the Baptist saying of Jesus, "he must increase and I must decrease" John 3:30). To believe is to be rooted in the faith and practice of the catholic, meaning universal, Church. Such a faith

carries risk and has consequences. It demands that I live with a good conscience, knowing right from wrong, seeking to pursue the right; it gives me a sense of purpose, a holy hope, a community to belong to; it requires me to live in perfect charity with all.

While there are those in this world who seek to live with a good conscience, knowing right from wrong; who live lives of hope; and who are in perfect charity others, the thing which sets us apart as Christians is that for us, these are the product of our confidence in Jesus Christ.

By inviting you to explore what it means to believe, it is our hope that you will be more ‘ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you’ (1 Peter 3:15). We will conclude today with a story of belief, I think you will find compelling.

Let’s turn to the Good News of Jesus Christ. John writes, “*What Jesus did in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him* (**John 2:1-11**).

In some respects, it seems like Jesus’ first miracle is underwhelming. He’s turning one beverage into another, water into wine. (If you had the power granted to you, what’d be your first miracle?) But this isn’t squirting flavour-crystals into bottled water. This man, who walked and talked like the rest of us, is revealing a glory, such that it evoked the fear, love, and trust of the disciples. They “believed in him” (**John 2:11**). While it’s true that some creatures or things have a glory unto themselves, like the brilliance of the sun or Queen Elizabeth II dressed in all her royal splendour, Jesus’ glory is found nowhere else in creation. Even this seemingly humble miracle shows that this man has the forces of creation at his fingertips. In this man, we find God’s very self at work.

Why did Jesus turn water into wine? John’s record of the story doesn’t explicitly say *why* Jesus turned the water into wine. What Jesus did, he did quietly. I suggest there is one reason *why*, but there are many things we can see in John ch 2

John, the author of the Gospel, said that it was through this “sign” that Jesus revealed his glory for the first time. John, the beloved disciple, saw glory in Jesus. Glory is a word meaning honour, dignity, and splendour. These words point to the deity of Jesus: God’s glory revealed at a normal, happy life event, a wedding in an obscure village, a glory that honors his mother’s request, honours the bride and groom avoiding social embarrassment, a glory the servants got to see happen and that totally flabbergasted the host of the banquet. The BEST wine after the guests have had too much to drink?? Who authorizes such extravagance? We see the glory of God’s authority over nature, over time and space, changing the molecular structure of water into wine which normally takes months or years of fermentation.

We see a counter-cultural movement begin; water used for ceremonial washing the outside of the body according to the law, pointed to something for cleansing *inside* the body, the Holy Spirit. This demonstration is just the beginning of his counterculture teaching. Over and over, Jesus would come to challenge the ways of the religious leaders, and the thinking of the people.

By diving deeper, we can see:

- Jesus is a bridegroom at the marriage supper of the lamb. Jesus is the vine.
- At the last supper, the wine represents the blood of Jesus that cleanses us inside.
- The simplicity of this miracle, mirrors the simplicity of **grace** found in Jesus.
- It's written "on the third day a wedding" and Jesus rose from the dead on the third day.
- Jesus was told "you have saved the best till now" the new **covenant** is a better covenant based on better promises. Jesus is the GOAT, Greatest of all time.

Hebrews 8:6 says, "But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator, is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises." You can see probably even more things to investigate.

At dinner one evening in the dining hall at Hartford College, Oxford University, a dining hall-refectory like you'd see in the Harry Potter movies, tall stone walls with portraits of benefactors like William Wilberforce, long wooden tables for students and a high table for faculty, a history professor asked the visiting preacher Dr Jerry Root why he was a Christian. Rather than showing sincere interest, the History Prof admitted later that the visiting preacher from America was seen as their entertainment for the evening. Dr Root said, I am a Christian because I am aware of failure in my life. I'm not aware of all of it but I am aware of enough of it to be devastated. I see the incongruities and I see the brokenness in my life. I find the love of God and the forgiveness of God a compelling doctrine and I am deeply moved by that and that's why I am a Christian. The history professor said, I can appreciate that, but that's not my issue. He said, I think I understand that. I didn't become a Christian and then become perfect overnight, when I was a young man at college; to become perfect took me two or three weeks! Everyone at the table broke up in laughter.

He said your laughter just betrayed you. She said, what do you mean? He said, You and I just met and you have no idea how that statement is incongruous with reality, that I'm nowhere near perfect, but either your read of history or your read of your own heart shows that nobody has it together. She said, You got me. He said, knowing your own struggle, how do you get by? She said, I have faith in humanity. He said, have you ever been wounded by another human being before? She said Of course.

He said, Have you ever wounded another human being? She said, I suppose so, she was little softer on herself. He said, well how does a faith in humanity work when we live in a world where we've been wounded and we wound others? She asked, how does that work for Christians? They spent the rest of dinner talking about the grace of God, the love of God, the mercies of God.

If humans live in denial of the realities of our need and to persist in this denial, there's the risk of it persisting forever; they run into something that's like an asylum, a diminished humanity where reality of themselves and of the grace of God is denied. It sounds like hell. CS Lewis wrote, a damned soul is nearly nothing, it is shrunk up, so used to living with battered forgetfulness of the worth of their soul that at some point they cannot choose the grace that relentlessly pursues them, seeking to free them. They, with clenched fists, believe in nothing but self, yet deny their own humanity and the humanity of others. Christians should be moved to weep over souls caught in this downward spiral and be insistent on proclaiming the Gospel to them, like somebody did with us and we broke out of our own delusions and finally came to faith, to believe, to love a God who would love us that much, to not give up on us even if we give up on ourselves.

As author Danielle Bournock argues, there is one reason why Jesus turned the water into wine. How can we know it when Jesus didn't say it at the time of the wedding? Well, because he said it later in **John 5:19**, *"Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."*

I submit that Jesus turned the water into wine because his Father directed him to do so. The Father knew the glory that would be revealed in that moment as well as what you and I would be able to learn later. He did this because he loves us. God knows we are capable of belief, even shrunken belief. WHAT you believe matters. The Lord wants us to take the risk with our everyday life by trusting Jesus, who in this quiet way, in this first sign of changing water into wine, in an obscure village wedding reception, before it was his time, brings glory to God, honours his mom, surprised the servants, delighted the host, and the wedding couple, and his disciples believed. Miracles can be quiet, humble.

How will you exercise belief this week? One last question, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, where do you need to see the water of 'same old, same old' turned to the wine of renewal?

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, read his Word and watch for the miracles!

Thanks be to God!