

“A Boost Up To The Fountain Of Life”— based on John 2:1ff & Psalm 36:5-10
Preached by Rev. Jonathan New
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I begin this sermon with a story from the LaKota people... One day, the Creator gathered all the people together — all, that is, except the human people: the salmon people and the eagle people and the buffalo people and the mole people. “I have a wonderful gift to give,” said the Creator, “but I’m worried because this is a very powerful gift. It is the gift of creation, healing, and life. I’m worried that the human people will find it, and they’re not ready for it. I want to hide it until they grow up a bit, but I don’t know where.”

Salmon said, “I will take it to the darkest cave on the ocean floor. They’ll never find it.” “No,” said the Creator, “One day they’ll make machines that will go beneath the seas, and they’ll find it.” Eagle said, “I will fly it to the highest mountain, beyond where any human being could ever go, up on the windswept peaks.” The Creator said, “No, they’re going to make machines that fly, and one day they will go up there, and they’ll find it.” Buffalo said, “I will take it to the prairie, where only the grass and wind go, and I will hide it under a clump of grass. They will never find it there.” And the Creator said, “No, one day they’ll go there, dig it up, and find it.” Mole said, “I will take it down to the center of the earth, and I will hide it there.” “No, no,” Creator said. “One day they’re going to dig down deep, looking for rocks, and they’re going to find it.”

The discussion went on and on like that, until silence fell upon all the gathered. But, suddenly, the Creator looked up and smiled. “I know where I shall hide it. I’ll hide it ... within them. They’ll never look there!”

The psalmist calls God the Fountain of Life. That’s a powerful image from a people living where water was and still is at a premium. It refers to a spring or source of flowing water, and, in that arid climate, it meant divinely bestowed bounty — God, the gracious source of all we require.

The Cana wedding story expands upon the theme of God, the Divine Life-Source. We often claim this scripture to show just how much he prized marriage, but Jesus isn't giving his stamp of approval to family values. We might even question his morals. The wedding guests have already chugged all the wine and what does Jesus do? He makes more. Each jar held 20-30 gallons. Jesus made an astonishing 150 gallons more. And it’s the good stuff! So does this story tell us Jesus was a partier or that he loved parlor tricks? Or was it a sign? To me, Jesus' first miracle is a window on God — the Fountain of Life — who offers abundant life, and a vivid enactment of the renewal of life Jesus’ ministry proclaimed.

But I've also been considering those characters we often overlook: The servants. Did they balk when told to fill those enormous water jars? Did they wonder when asked to bring some to the steward? Did they marvel when he pronounced it the best of wine? Did they scramble to taste it themselves? Were they awe-struck about their own role? Well, we only know they just did as they were asked. So doing, these water-bearers became central figures in this extravagant blessing. They hadn’t accomplished the great thing, but they knew they were a part of it. I suggest Jesus turning the water into wine is symbolic of what God does with our gifts: taking

simple things and turning them into life-giving, life-enriching blessings that speak volumes about God's extravagant love.

Often, I think we act as if God's wine has run out and that's that. After all, isn't God in charge of how the Fountain flows? Isn't it up to God to transform the water of our lives into wine? Maybe. But the LaKota story I began with is instructive. God has endowed us with the gift of creation, and healing, and life; a power we can bestow on others, only it often remains hidden. God is the source but we have a role as well.

This talk of fountains reminds me of a hot summer day ten years or more ago, on a playground in suburban Boston, when my then four-year-old daughter, Ellie, stood on tip-toes, stretching and straining to reach the faucet of a water fountain. The font was there, but she couldn't get to it. But along came big sister, Sarah, who boosted her up enough to get that drink she craved. Isn't that what we're here for? Jesus reminded us there are guests needing welcome to the celebration of life, countless ones thirsty or hungry, physically or spiritually.

Next week we'll remember a man who called us to thirst-quenching work. Martin Luther King, Jr. knew about water fountains — “whites only” fountains and, where the thirst of black Americans was considered at all, the second-rate so-called “colored” fountains to which his people were relegated. King called us to our Christian duty: ensuring that every person was refreshed. He reminded us it's all too convenient to think it's up to God to turn on the Fountain of Life. But, like the water-bearers, with no certainty of the result of our actions, we may yet be the occasion for new life to flow into people's lives and it's our responsibility to do so.

Over the past year, I've learned the many ways that this congregation is committed to helping others to God's refreshing waters. New needs arise and this congregation responds. Today, we'll do it again as we begin a conversation about Open and Affirming; about our welcome, particularly to those who've felt excluded from church life. I don't know what the outcome of this conversation will be or what it ought to be. But my hope is that we'll carry with us a two-fold question into this: What obstacles have kept gays and lesbians and a variety of others from reaching God's refreshing waters that flow in the midst of church life, and what can we do to give them the boost up they require?

Aesop told of the crow who'd grown so thirsty he could barely caw. He flew down to a big pitcher where he had gotten a drink only the day before, but there was only a little bit of water remaining in at the bottom. He tried and tried to reach it with his beak, but the pitcher was too deep and his beak too short. But just as he was about to give up, he knew what to do. He flew back and forth from the garden to the pitcher until he was able to drink easily from the pitcher while sitting on its edge. What did the crow do? He gathered pebbles, one by one, and dropped them into the pitcher until the water rose to the top.

God's waters never go dry; God's wine never runs out. Sometimes, when we think they have, we find around and within us that God's best wine is still being served. We don't always know how things will turn out or have the gifts to make lives whole. But it's not our role to worry about where the wine comes from or the change required for it to appear. Our job is to take our ordinary gifts and drop them into the pitcher, so together we might enable our sometimes unknown sisters and brothers to drink of the Water of Life, confident that God can transform our simple actions into the occasion for the gift of life God offers all.