

Message for January 16, 2022

John 2:1-11

I am beginning today's message by sharing a true story with you that comes from the life of the writer Robert Fulghum. It is perhaps a little bit lengthy but since it is an episode from Fulghum's life it should be told in his own words.

"The summer of 1959. At the Feather River Inn near the town of Blairsden in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. And I, just out of college, have a job that combines being the night desk clerk in the lodge and helping out with the horse-wrangling at the stables. The owner and I do not get along.

One week the employees had been served the same thing for lunch every single day. Two wieners, a mound of sauerkraut, and stale rolls. To compound insult with injury, the cost of meals was deducted from our check. I was outraged.

On Friday night of that awful week, I was at my desk job and the night auditor had just come on duty. I went into the kitchen to get a bite to eat and saw notes to the effect that wieners and sauerkraut are on the employee menu for two more days.

That tears it. I quit! For lack of any better audience, I unloaded on the night auditor, Sigmund Wollman. I declared that I have had it up to here; I don't like wieners and sauerkraut enough to eat it one day and the whole hotel stinks anyhow and the horses are all nags and the guests are all idiots and I'm packing my bags!

I raved on in this way for twenty minutes. My monologue was delivered at the top of my lungs, punctuated by blows on the front desk with a fly-swatter, the kicking of chairs, and much profanity.

As I pitched my fit, Sigmund Wollman sat quietly on his stool, smoking a cigarette, watching me with sorrowful eyes. Put a bloodhound in a suit and tie and you have Sigmund Wollman. He's got good reason to look sorrowful. German Jew. Survivor of Auschwitz. He liked being alone at the night job – gave him peace and quiet, and, even more, he could go into the kitchen and have a snack whenever he wanted to – all the wieners and sauerkraut he

wanted. In Auschwitz he dreamed of such a time. The only person he sees at work is me, the nightly disturber of his dream. And here I am again.

‘Fulghum, are you finished?’

‘No. Why?’

‘Lissen, Fulghum. Lissen me. You know what’s wrong with you? It’s not wieners and kraut and it’s not the boss and it’s not this job.’

‘So what’s wrong with me?’

‘Fulghum, you think you know everything, but you don’t know the difference between an inconvenience and a problem. If you break your neck, if you have nothing to eat, if your house is on fire – then you got a problem. Everything else is inconvenience. Life *is* inconvenient. Learn to separate the inconveniences from the real problems. You will live longer. And will not annoy people like me so much. Good night.’

In a gesture combining dismissal and blessing, he waved me off to bed.”

Fulghum then went on to write:

“Seldom in my life have I been hit between the eyes with truth so hard. There in that late-night darkness of the Feather Run Inn, Sigmund Wollman simultaneously kicked my butt and opened a window in my mind.

For thirty years now, in times of stress and strain, when something has me backed against a wall and I’m ready to do something really stupid, a sorrowful face appears in my mind and asks: ‘Problem or inconvenience?’”

What I just shared with you was a pivotal moment in Fulghum’s life. This episode was, to use a theological term, a revelation. A curtain so-to-speak was pulled back, and an insight and truth were offered, an insight and truth that could either be accepted or rejected. Because it was accepted though, Fulghum’s life was never quite the same again. And as it was with him so it was with the disciples in today’s scripture passage.

It was at the beginning of his ministry and Jesus, along with some of his disciples, were at a wedding reception. Everyone was having a good time but as the hours passed the host kept a nervous eye on the wine jugs; bit by bit the levels were dropping. Indeed the big question was which would give out first, the wine or the guests? Now however he knew the answer; the party was still in full swing but there was virtually no wine left. It was going to be a social disaster and this wedding was going to be remembered for all of the wrong reasons! Jesus' mother realized what was happening and she urged him to do something. Jesus was most reluctant but Mary remained insistent and told the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to.

As it happened, there were six large water jars standing nearby, each of which could hold between twenty and thirty gallons. Jesus ordered that the jugs be filled with water and then a sample of the contents be served to the master of ceremonies. The MC was amazed when he tasted it; why this was the best wine that he had ever had! He called the bridegroom over and teased him, pointing out that at every other wedding reception he had ever attended, the good wine had been served first and then, after the guests had drunk enough, the inferior wine was brought out. He on the other hand had reversed the usual order and saved the best till last!

This then is what happened at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee when Jesus performed his very first miracle. In the past when I have preached on this passage, I have usually focused on the meaning and significance of the miracle itself, the result being that I missed the significance of one particular line: "and his disciples believed in him".

At Cana of Galilee, Jesus revealed his true identity; a revelation took place and a truth was revealed but it was up to the disciples whether or not they accepted it. The choice was theirs and one of the things that a revelation demands is either acceptance or rejection. A revelation took place in Cana of Galilee that day and because the disciples accepted it, their lives were never the same. A revelation also took place on a summer night back in 1959 and Robert Fulghum's acceptance of it meant that his life would never be the same either. Revelations are offered to us as well and also to the world in which we live.

Besides the pandemic, the past two years have been tumultuous ones; there was for example the George Floyd case in the United States. There was also the discovery of the graves of missing indigenous children and the crisis in

the long-term care homes in our own country. What we may not realize however is that all three of these were 'revelations' that told us some painful truths that we are free to either accept or reject.

In the case of George Floyd, we witnessed the brutal death of a black man at the hands of a police officer, even as he repeatedly told the officer that he couldn't breathe. The subsequent airing of the killing on social media prompted outrage in both the United States and elsewhere, including our own community where a large demonstration took place. People everywhere took to the streets in protest. How often have similar events happened in the past that were never recorded? A curtain was pulled back and an ugly revelation about racism was offered, but will this revelation be accepted or rejected? Will lasting change take place or will things go back to 'normal'?

To use another example, the discovery of thousands of unmarked graves of indigenous children sparked outrage. Once again, a curtain was drawn back and a painful and disturbing revelation about our society and its values was offered. Will it be accepted, leading to lasting change or will things revert back to 'normal'?

We can also think of what happened in our long-term care homes at the beginning of the pandemic. A disproportionate number of their residents contracted Covid and died. Once again a curtain was drawn back, and an insight was offered. Do we truly value and care for the elderly and vulnerable members of our society? Will the insights offered be accepted or rejected? Will meaningful change take place or will we take the easy way and risk letting history repeat itself?

Now this is not for one moment to suggest that it was the will of God that George Floyd be killed, that the children be treated the way they were, or that so many of our seniors perished, all so that he could offer us revelations. *God is Love* and love would never do such things. These tragedies were a result of human choice and decision. However, we also believe that God was not just active in the days of the Bible and has been quiet ever since. Rather God is present, active and at work today too, trying to bring good out of the bad. Whether it be in our personal lives or in the life of the world around us, revelations and new insights are offered, however painful or disturbing as they may be. And so, as individuals and as a society, we are confronted by the same question that the disciples faced at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Do we

accept the revelations and insights offered, knowing that our acceptance means that our lives will never be quite the same again? Or do we turn away?

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God, help us to be still as we come to you in prayer. You are the Holy One, the Righteous One, the Creator of the rolling spheres of outer space, and the sub-atomic particles that we can barely even begin to imagine. You are so far from us and yet you are so close to us, all at the same time. We thank you for the wonder that is you, and we thank you for being present and active in our lives, in the lives of others, and in the world beyond. We pray that you will grant us the eyes, ears, and minds of faith to discern you when you reveal yourself, your ways, and your will to us.

We thank you for the wonderful gift of our lives, and for everyone and everything in them that makes them so good and precious.

We pray this day for all for whom life is not so good. As the pandemic continues and things seem to get worse rather than better, we pray for all who are ill and especially for those in the hospitals and in the ICU's. We pray for all who work to care for them, even as they risk their own health or struggle with their own physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

With the return of the children to school tomorrow, we pray for their well-being and that of their teachers and all of the other staff.

We pray for those in authority and our very society itself as we struggle with our values, trying to balance the rights of those who have chosen not to be vaccinated with the health, well-being, and safety of everyone else.

We pray for an end to this pandemic sooner rather than later, and we pray that we may all emerge from it as better people with a stronger faith, hope, and trust in you.

Even as we are so aware of all that is not right, we thank you for the blessings, the peace, and the stability that we do have. We remember the people of Afghanistan even as their hunger grows because of the food

shortages. We remember the people of Ukraine as the tensions with Russia simmer with the threat of invasion. We pray for your reconciling, healing, and redeeming presence throughout the whole of this world.

We ask these things in your Son's name. Amen