

Trust and Transformation

John 2:1-11

November 15, 2009

One Christmas someone in the church gave us a box containing a kit for growing paperwhite lilies. When we opened it up there was a pot, some gravel and a few flower bulbs that looked rather sad. They were dry looking and the outside layers were peeling off. The instruction said that they should be placed in the gravel inside the pot and watered. Looking at those bulbs one might think that there was no reason to put water to them – there couldn't possibly be any life inside those things. But we did it anyway. I thought it might be interesting to see if anything would happen.

Sure enough, after a few days some spindly, hair-like projections began to worm their way out of the bulb and down into the gravel. A few days later, thicker greenish white sprouts began to burst out of the top of that previously lifeless looking lump. In mid-January, the transformation was almost complete. Two long green shoots had climbed about eight inches high and at the tip of each stalk a plump bud had formed. A few more days of pale winter sunlight and the beauty of those delicate white flowers was revealed.

Forcing bulbs to bloom in the dead of winter is a practice that takes a lot of faith. It's hard to imagine anything that looks less promising than a dormant flower bulb. Too hard to be an onion, its papery skin sloughing off like it has some nasty disease, there's nothing to suggest that new life and rare beauty lurk just beneath its surface. Its dried up appearance gives no clue that the bulb is brimming with new life.

If you were to open a horticulture textbook you would be able to find the scientific principles that explain how a dormant bulb can be forced to grow and bloom.

We tend to have confidence in observable scientific knowledge. For example, we know how the rotation of the earth around the sun affects the length of our days and the warmth of our climates. However, about other less measurable matters we're less bold. If results and conclusions can't be nailed down with calculated numbers or provable facts, we back away from declaring any firm commitments, or taking any leaps of faith.

In today's gospel text Mary or as John always refers to her, the mother of Jesus has no doubts. Confronted with a problem beyond her abilities, the social faux pas of running out of wine at the wedding celebration, she confidently turns to Jesus for a solution. Yet, notice that Mary never asks Jesus to do anything. She simply lays the problem out before him and awaits his response.

Mary's confidence isn't in Jesus' ability to take any specific action on the matter. Rather *her confidence is in Jesus himself*, in his very nature.

Even when Jesus' response to his mother sounds more like a reprimand or "don't-bother-me" reply, Mary remains confident in her son and entrusts the situation to him. Jesus' words suggest he's looking far beyond the wedding feast in Cana, even all the way to the cross on Golgotha. But Mary remains focused on the needs that surround them at the moment.

Perhaps only a mother could get away with micro-managing the wine-shortage problem without ever telling her son what to do. Although Jesus' first response to the problem reveals no inclination to deal with it, Mary responds by going to the servants and telling them to do "whatever he tells you" (verse 5). It's Mary's indirect-directive that leads Jesus to perform what John carefully records as the first of his signs (verse 11).

But Mary's actions are more than mere motherly manipulation. She alone knows of Jesus' miraculous birth. She alone has watched him grow and mature into manhood. It's to that son, this man whose voice and vision had already found followers, that Mary goes with confidence and trust.

Mary trusted that Jesus' actions and words would fit the needs of the situation. She did not know what he would do or how he would do it. But still she had the confidence to order the servants to "do whatever he tells you."

Mary's trust opens the door for transformation.

Jesus' budding ministry was all about transformation. Everything Jesus did throughout the course of his time on earth was a variation on this same theme of transformation: turning water into wine, turning the lame into walkers, turning the blind into see-ers, turning haters into lovers, and doubters into believers.

But there can be no transformation without trust.

Do you have trust that can lead to transformation? Can you trust the transformations that God has already begun in you, as you wait for the unknown flower to appear from all the gravel and gunk?

Or do you never venture past the safe harbor of informed response based on information. Are you information-based or transformation-based? The gospel isn't about Jesus offering us new information. The gospel is about Jesus offering us transformation. Jesus turns the ordinary into the extraordinary, the water of our lives into the best wine heaven can make.

The greatest advancements in science, medicine, political policies, economic growth all have in common an element of the unknown. Information brought leaders to a precipice, a decisive movement in time and place. But it has always been some unseen force, some yielding to that

which lies beyond the provable and knowable, that has enabled history's greatest leaders to take that last step forward into new, uncharted territory.

Everyone told Columbus he would sail off the edge of the world . . . but on trust he kept going all the way off the map. Everyone told the American colonists that they could never win a victory and freedom from English rule . . . but on trust they staged their seemingly impossible revolution. Everyone told Lewis and Clark they would never find their way through the uncharted western wilderness . . . but on trust they journey to the Pacific coast and back again. Everyone told you . . . what?

There is a great hymn of the church that speaks to us even today about our relationship with Jesus. It challenges us to allow the Holy Spirit to transform our lives so that we can trust in the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to the words again:

'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take him at his word, just to rest upon his promise, just to know, "thus saith the Lord." Jesus, Jesus, how I trust him! How I've proved him o'er and o'er! Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus! O for grace to trust him more!