

Think of who could be a person that is unlikely to matter in the world. We might think of ourselves. What about an orphan who has been raised in a country that has conquered her homeland. What about a young woman in a society controlled by men. What about a Jew in a nation that is easily prejudiced against that heritage. This all describes Esther. What chance does she have to reveal God's glory? How can she possibly be part of what God is doing? We know from our scripture reading that unlikely as it may seem, Esther becomes queen. God works through her transformation from a beautiful, yet ordinary woman into queen of all Persia and Media. God reveals that there is more to her than beauty. God uses her to protect his people as she risks sharing the vulnerability of her heritage with the king.

God transforms the ordinary to reveal the extraordinary! This is a main theme of the Gospel of John.

In John chapter 2, Jesus is at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. He has just called ordinary people to follow him. Jesus had shown how he really knew those he called to follow like Nathanael. (We have a deep desire to be known. To be known and still be asked to follow Jesus that is amazing.) Jesus had told the new disciple Nathanael he would see even greater things. It is the third day after this when Jesus does the first of his signs that reveals his glory.

We have to stop here because we know that Jesus died to save us from sin and on the third day something even greater happened. He was raised from the dead. He conquered death so that through believing in him we might have life everlasting. We are not just known by Jesus and transformed into his disciple. We are saved and transformed to reveal new life in Christ. It is through people like us, through those who follow Jesus that the extraordinary saving power of the signs Jesus did is testified to and revealed.

So after choosing to follow Jesus we arrive with the disciples and Jesus' mother on the third day at the wedding. In the Bible the wedding feast is a symbol of the joy of God's reign.

We share with Jesus in the celebration of how God's reign is breaking through into our world in the everyday events of life. But God's kingdom has not yet come in its fullness. Our celebration, our joy like this wedding faces crises, tragedies, things that threaten to short circuit our joy, things that threaten to keep us from revealing new life in Christ.

At this wedding the wine runs out. This is a disaster for the bridegroom and family. This would be stigma that haunted the marriage and severely damaged the reputation of the family. Mary's concern is to save face for the bridegroom and

family. She brings this crisis to Jesus' attention with the expectation he will do something. Jesus offers resistance. He does this to make clear that he is in control of the situation. He does not just do whatever someone he loves wants. He is not primarily about satisfying physical needs, adding to happiness, but offering a sign of salvation, to enlist belief. So that lives would be transformed.

Jesus does not just take someone who is in crisis or in need and do a makeover. He doesn't change the surface or do what we want because we think that will bring back our happiness. Jesus' work is one of transformation that doesn't just solve a problem but reveals God at work, yes in the midst of the need but even beyond the crisis we are aware of. (As we learn Jesus does turn the water into wine not just to solve a problem but to reveal his glory.)

Mary tells the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' This is the challenge of expectant faith. Will we really listen for what Jesus tells us? Will we do what Jesus says? Here the response is obedience. Doing whatever Jesus commands is the essence of discipleship. Doing what Jesus commands reveals the miracle. The servants participate in the miracle because they do what Jesus says. All action is that of servants. As we follow Jesus we are part of the transformation of the ordinary. Jesus reveals the extraordinary as he works through us and in us. Jesus has the servants fill six jars that were ordinarily used for ritual cleansing. The water removes uncleanness for a time. The water in these jars brings and symbolizes only temporary cleansing. This water changes to wine. We know, as we acknowledge each time in Communion that wine represents Jesus' blood shed for us for the forgiveness (for the cleansing) of our sins, once for all. In this sign, not only is ordinary water transformed into wine. The whole idea of cleansing is transformed. In this transformation, Jesus reveals the extraordinary saving power he offers.

This sign does not necessarily lead to belief or transformation. Notice the steward did not know where the wine had come from. Also, it says in verse 11 that his disciples believed in him. People did not swarm Jesus as a miracle worker. Life went on as before for most people. It is possible to see God's help for us and not to believe. This may come from ignorance, outright rejection or enthusiasm which fails to change us. There are excuses, but Jesus provides signs for us that reveal the glory of God that we would believe and be transformed. Jesus shows that as we follow him and are transformed we would reveal the extraordinary life found in Jesus Christ.

Do we really believe that we can be a part of what God is doing in the world? Do we believe that we can see Jesus unveiling his glory among us in our everyday lives? Our tendency is to believe that transformation can only come by our effort. Just pull yourself up by your bootstraps or work harder or on the other

hand I have failed. We ignore how spiritual powers can operate directly to change our world.

1 Corinthians 12 tells us that God manifests the spirit in each of us who believe, giving us gifts and ministries. Our lives can be evidence that there is transformation. Our lives can be signs that reveal God's glory.

We may get discouraged. The results we seek and ask for do not always happen immediately. There is transformation in a person in a small group of people, yet existence goes on as before. "To believe in Jesus Christ is to live a life with in a life. Nothing is changed, but everything is changed." (Sloyan, 37) We can not manipulate Jesus, but we are given gifts that prove to be signs of God's power and love.

Jesus knows you and has given you a spiritual gift to be used in ministry. These signs give us and others the opportunity to see Jesus and to be transformed as we believe in him. Do our lives show that the ordinary has become the extraordinary? Is it evident in our fellowship there is something extraordinary to be revealed, the life of Jesus Christ, God's word become flesh, put into action by us as empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord works transformation: Jewish orphan becomes queen of Persia and Media, Water becomes Wine, Ordinary self focused person becomes a person with spiritual gifts to be used for the common good. In these transformations the extraordinary grace, love, and saving power of God is revealed. Let us do what Jesus says so we will be a part of this!