STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, January 11, 2009

Resolutions that Matter (Week 1 of 4)

RICH

John 2:1-10

Three days later there was a wedding in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. Jesus and his disciples were guests also. When they started running low on wine at the wedding banquet, Jesus' mother told him, "They're just about out of wine." Jesus said, "Is that any of our business, Mother—yours or mine? This isn't my time. Don't push me."

She went ahead anyway, telling the servants, "Whatever he tells you, do it."

Six stoneware water pots were there, used by the Jews for ritual washings. Each held twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus ordered the servants, "Fill the pots with water." And they filled them to the brim.

"Now fill your pitchers and take them to the host," Jesus said, and they did.

When the host tasted the water that had become wine (he didn't know what had just happened but the servants, of course, knew), he called out to the bridegroom, "Everybody I know begins with their finest wines and after the guests have had their fill brings in the cheap stuff. But you've saved the best till now!"

The Word from the Bible, the Message

The Miracle at Cana

From the Interpreter's Bible Dictionary

Each of the gospels begins the story of Jesus' ministry in Galilee with incidents and sayings appropriate to its thematic emphasis. John selects the first of Jesus' signs which manifested his glory, and as a result of which his disciples not only followed him but believed in him. The scene is laid in Cana – possibly as a link with the preceding call of the "true Israelite," Nathanael. It begins a cycle of stories and discourses which will return for a second sign in Cana (4:46-54), and which still introduce the manifestation of Christ to the world of Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles.

The incident is an excellent example of the author's ability to tell an interesting story. The details are inherently plausible, but at the same time, full of symbolic meaning. He is a consummate allegorist (see Matthew 13:10-17). It will be noted that in the gospel, Jesus never imparts his teaching by parables, though he often uses allegories.

The miracle takes place on the third day, an unmistakable pointer to the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. The village wedding feast is a foretaste – with the good wine supplied by Jesus – of the "marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:7-9; Matthew 22:2-14; Luke 12:36-37). The water jugs of Jewish purification ceremonies have become empty (Mark 7:1-4). They are now to be filled with the new wine of the last times (Amos 9:13-14) – and wine in abundance. In this miracle Jesus produces some 120 gallons, an excessive amount indeed if intended merely as wine needed for the local feast. Numerous early Christian paintings and sculptures associate the Cana miracle and the feeding of the multitude (chapter 6) with the feasting of the redeemed in the age to come.

Wine is also the symbol of blood. The first miracle and sign of Moses leading to the deliverance of the people of God from bondage in Egypt was the turning of water into blood (Exodus 7:13-24). The gospel author stresses the life-giving water and blood that Jesus will give his disciples to drink (4:13-15; 6:53-56). The final sign of this new life in the Spirit is attested in the streams of water and blood that flow from his pierced side when his death is

accomplished (19:34-35; 1 John 5:6-8). Many interpreters, both ancient and modern, see in this symbolism specific reference to the cleansing and empowering gifts of Christ in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Top American Resolutions

It seems there is a survey for everything these days. *USA Today* did a survey to find the most popular resolutions in the United States.

1. Lose weight
2. Save money
3. Get fit
4. Eat right
5. Get a better job
6. Drink less alcohol
7. Quit smoking
8. Reduce stress
9. Take a trip
10. Volunteer to help others

How to Make and Keep Resolutions

The following recommendations come from Chico West and Steven Lytle of West Counseling in Dallas as published in the *Dallas Morning News*.

More than 90% of the New Year's resolutions that are made are not kept. Half of them don't last a month. Here are some of the reasons resolutions fail with suggested solutions to keeping them:

1. I made unrealistic resolutions

Never is a bad word to use. Never-ending statements are bad, too. Saying you're going to work out every week doesn't make allowances for unforeseen events, such as illness. Try to set goals that are attainable, not goals that set you up for failure.

2. I made general resolutions

In addition to making resolutions too hard, many make them too vague, such as a resolution "to lose weight."

You don't really know what you're trying to attain. Make a specific goal and a plan to reach it – one with attainable steps that fit your individual needs. Make the steps part of the resolution.

3. I didn't write down my resolution

Writing it down is the first step toward accountability. Then you're ready to make a plan to achieve the goal. When a resolution is written down it is out there for others to see and provide accountability. Most people fail in New Year's resolutions because they're doing it by themselves. Everyone needs a community to help them change.

4. I didn't ask anyone for help

Friends or loved ones can provide advice on what is reasonable for you, helping you figure out your game plan. A friend who has done well in the area you are trying to improve on can provide advice. And these partners can provide encouragement.

5. I didn't reward my victories

Rewards are great incentive to long term success. Without something to look forward to, there is a tendency to get "burned out." Awards should be personal, immediate and appropriate. In other words, it needs to be something that is important to you. The reward needs to be obtainable as soon as possible after the goal or milestone is met so the reward is associated with the hard work. The area of appropriateness can be a trap. For example, rewarding yourself with a eating binge when you have done well with your diet will defeat the purpose of the change you are trying to make. This is another area where accountability partners can help you make wise decision.

6. I wasn't flexible

Part of success is expecting little failures. If you should mess up, don't feel like you have to wait until next year to make a new resolution. It's good to pause and take some time, but you can pause and take time many times of your life, any time of the year.

Daily Readings

Please note: *We begin the year by focusing our attention on the gospel of Mark. For the next several weeks we will move carefully through Mark's gospel following the message and story of Jesus the Christ.*

Monday, January 12 – *Read Mark 1:1-11.* Mark begins his gospel quickly. Unlike Matthew and Luke who begin with the birth of Jesus, Mark jumps directly to the story of John the Baptist in the wilderness and the proclamation of Jesus' coming. Like John the Baptist, we are also called to prepare the way for Christ. In what ways will you prepare the way Christ today?

Tuesday, January 13 – *Read Mark 1:12-20.* These eight verses include the baptism of Jesus, the temptation of Jesus, and the call of the first four disciples. Mark's favorite word in describing the ministry of Jesus is ***immediately***. His gospel reflects this urgency as he wastes no time in getting to the meat of Jesus' ministry. As you look at your life in relation to the call of the first disciples, are you willing to follow Jesus as they did? What would you be willing to leave behind to follow Him?

Wednesday, January 14 – *Read Mark 1:21-34.* Beginning with verse 21, Mark shares with us a series of miracles. He wants us to know that Jesus has authority over demons, illness and nature. There is nothing outside the authority of Jesus, and yet we know He care for us and is willing to die for us. As you go through your day, reflect on how much God loves you. Do you need the touch of Jesus in your life?

Thursday, January 15 – *Read Mark 1:35-2:12.* Mark continues his rapid movement through the early weeks of Jesus' ministry. In these passages, Mark records the beginning of Jesus' preaching ministry, the cleansing of a leper, and the healing of a man who is paralyzed. Read this passage several times. As you read it, reflect on your life – your hurts, hopes, dreams and expectations. What needs to be cleansed? Is there some part of your life that is paralyzed?

Friday, January 16 – *Read Mark 2:13-28.* Mark begins this section with the calling of Matthew as a disciple. Matthew is a tax collector, and as such, is deemed unclean by the religious community. This acceptance of Matthew as a disciple is a direct challenge to the religious elite of the day. Then Mark tells us about a conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees over the observance of the Sabbath. Jesus was taking care of the hunger needs of his disciples, and in the process, he was technically breaking the Sabbath law. Jesus responds, ***"The Sabbath was made for human kind, not human kind for the Sabbath."*** Jesus has come to put the value of human life above everything. Love is the value we seek, not just the following a ritual or law. In what ways will your actions today show love to someone else? Is there someone that needs your love that you have excluded from your life over principal? Can you love that person like God loves us?