

# PASTORS PENNINGS

## Jesus Turns Water into Wine

*This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him (John 2:11).*

A wedding is a day of celebration not only for the bride and groom, but also for friends and relatives who are happy for the couple. Preparing to get married can make for some anxious moments. But preparing to just attend a wedding can also cause a little angst as we hunt for the perfect wedding gift, a gift that will be unique, but useful for the newlyweds.

Jesus once attended a wedding with some of his disciples and his mother, Mary. A wedding celebration today will last six or seven hours. In Jesus' day it lasted six or seven days. It's easy to see how this celebration could have run out of wine. That would have been a major embarrassment for the couple. But Mary trusted that her son could provide the perfect gift. At first, Jesus' response might seem startling: "Dear woman, why do you involve me? ... My time has not yet come" (John 2:4). Jesus didn't say he couldn't deliver a miracle. But he wanted Mary to realize that while he was her son, he was also her Savior who had now begun his public ministry. He would not jump the gun on the work predetermined by his heavenly Father. Mary heard the words "not yet" in her son's reply and told the servants to follow his orders.

Jesus told the servants to fill six large stone jars with water. Then he ordered them to take a sample to the wedding's wine taster, who took a sip and tasted wine instead of water! He even mentioned his surprise that the better wine had been saved for the end of the banquet. Jesus saw the need and filled it—abundantly. He provided the perfect gift by his almighty power.

The apostle John calls this the first of many miraculous "signs" that Jesus performed during his ministry. Signs point the way to something, like to the Interstate, the nearest gas station, or a rest area. Jesus' miracles recorded in the Bible point to him as the way to heaven. He's more than a great man. He is God's Son who supplied the perfect life that God demands from us. His death on the cross delivered the perfect gift—forgiveness for our sins and by faith a reserved place at the eternal wedding supper of heaven. His powerful resurrection—the greatest miracle—proves his words and work to be true.

Today, we can depend on Jesus to provide everything that we need for this life and the next. In fact, He will "do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20).

### STEWARDSHIP

(Terry Eischen is supposed to write an article on the stewardship conference he attended at Camp Shiloh last month. If it comes use it and the following. If it does not come, please

remind him for the next month's news letter.)

2 Cor 9:6 "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously [*literally, "on the basis of blessing," that is, as he has been blessed (see Luke 6:38, "Give, and it will be given to you")*] will reap generously.

2 Cor. 9:7 Each man should give what he has decided [*the Greek has the added idea of deciding beforehand*] in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

1. On the basis of verse 6, would you agree or disagree? It is proper to tell God's people that if they give, God will give to them.

*Not in a crass way, for example, "If you give this much money, God will give you even more money." But we can promise, since God promises, that God will care for his people and always give them what they need.*

2. On the basis of verse 6, would you agree or disagree? True Christian giving is sacrificial in nature. *Disagree. It was Christ's giving that was sacrificial. He gave up what he had-his own life-that we might have life. Christians merely give from what God has given to them.*

3. On the basis of verse 7, agree or disagree? A passage such as this suggests the value of "pledging" offerings (see also 9:5, "the generous gift you had promised"). *It depends on what is meant by "pledging." This verse doesn't speak about promising to a congregation, etc., to give a certain amount of money (though it is not wrong to do so). It does speak, though, about the importance of Christians planning how they will use the money God has given to them.*

4. Agree or disagree? It is wrong for a church to suggest to its members how much to give? *It is not always wrong to do this. More important, however, is for the church to teach its members what God says about giving and, through the preaching of the gospel, help its members give with proper motivation. Why we give comes first; then comes what we give.*

From a Bible study, "First Century Stewardship" by David Vallesky

### EVANGELISM

You may have heard the jokes that begin: "I've got some good news for you!" *You have won a vacation home! But the bad news is..."It's located in Siberia.*

God also has some good news for you:

*I have a heavenly home prepared.*

But the bad news is:

*Even though I want everyone there, not everyone is going to get there.*

Can you be sure that you will go to heaven? Most people don't think so, or they're not sure.

Here is an outline you can use to share the basic message of salvation.

I have some Good News!

God says in the Bible that **HEAVEN IS A FREE GIFT!**

This truth will become even more beautiful after we look at the “Bad News.”

The “BAD NEWS”.... is all about

I. THE HUMAN PREDICAMENT

- A. I AM A SINNER (“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of god.” Rom. 3:23)
- B. GOD’S STANDARD IS PERFECTION. (“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” Matt. 5:48)
- C. GOD IS A JUST GOD (“The wages of sin is death. Rom. 6:23)

The “GOOD NEWS”...is all about

II. THE DIVINE SOLUTION

- A. GOD IS LOVE (God is love I John 4:8)
- B. JESUS CHRIST IS THE WORLD’S SAVIOR (John 3:16)  
HE IS TRUE GOD AND MAN (2 Cor. 5:21)
- C. THE FREE GIFT IS RECEIVED BY FAITH (Eph. 2:8,9)

PRAYER LIST

This last month several people had some serious surgeries and are mending at home. Let us thank our Lord for sparing the lives of Doug Dinse and Gary Hahn who had complete hip replacements, and for Bev Quam who had a double heart transplant. Let us also pray fervently for Georgia Bigaouette who was hospitalized with pneumonia and heart problems and the brother of Janet Finney, Gene Abbott who will have some difficult back surgery on December 30<sup>th</sup>. God is good and he promises “The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.”

NORMAN MISSION

Many hours of planning have taken place and now on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, by the grace of God, an outreach effort by Holy Cross will begin in the Norman area on Sunday, January 3<sup>rd</sup>. Until the effort is organized it will remain under the control of Holy Cross’s Board of outreach. The current plan is to have services on Sundays at 1PM, Bible Study at 2:15PM and confirmation for two and 1\2 hours after that. The activities will be held at a small conference room in the new Embassy Suites Hotel on 24<sup>th</sup> Ave. Just South of Tecumseh Rd. Hymn books have been ordered. Instead of a keyboard, hymns will be played over speaker systems using CD/s put out by North Western Publishing House. Someone will have to start and stop the computer at the appropriate times. Holy Cross members who will be part of the initial group have pledged over \$20,000 for the first year. Envelopes with the name, “Norman Mission” will be placed in

Holy Cross mail boxes every month by the Elders. The first order of business will be to get better organized. Next, it will be to heavily advertize our reason for existence and find ways to reach out into the community.

#### HOLY CROSS/NORMAN MISSION

On our monthly calendars and in the news letter we will be providing information about the planned activities for Holy Cross congregation and the Norman Mission congregation. To differentiate between the two, HC and NM will be used. HC will pertain to Holy Cross and NM will pertain to the Norman Mission.

#### HIGH LIGHTS FROM CHRISTMAS CAROLING

About 21 people, including a few choir members and a lot of young people went caroling on Sunday afternoon, December 20<sup>th</sup>. We sang at the homes of Anna Massucci in Mustang, Doug and Robyn Dinse north of Mustang, Gary and Joy Hahn, the Tahah family, Mrs. Roberta Kinnamon, South West Medical Center third floor and ICU, ending at the hospital room Georgia Bigaouette was in, and at Russell Luebking's apartment. After singing, refreshments, fellowship and some Spanish singing took place at the parsonage. All of the people we sang for seemed to deeply appreciate the effort. Everyone who participated seemed to have a very good time. We praise God for everyone who was able to participate and make it a very rewarding event.

#### THANKS TO THOSE WHO SERVED DURING 2009

On December 27<sup>th</sup> new officers and board members will be installed. As the old year passes it is appropriate to thank all the outgoing members who faithfully served their Lord giving hours of their time to make Holy Cross a beautiful place organized around the great commission to bring the Gospel to all people. Our thanks also goes to those who help prepare our Sunday worship bulletins, newsletters, calendars, and special worship services. Not only did these and members of committees and boards work faithfully, but Holy Cross would not be what it is if God had not moved many, many people, men, women, and youth, who were not on any boards or committees to give hundreds of hours to their Lord in service to God's Kingdom. We thank you! More importantly we thank the Lord for having moved you to serve selflessly, without hope of reward. For all of you who have served in whatever big or small way, God has blessed your work richly. Two Psalms express well our appreciation for each other in this our family of faith. The first one is Psalm 134.

"Praise the Lord all you servants of the Lord who minister by night in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord. May the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth bless you from Zion."

The second one is Psalm 133.

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there

the Lord bestows his blessing even Life forevermore.”

#### PASTOR/TEACHER/DELEGATE CONFERENCE

Pastor and several congregational leaders will be driving to Abiding Word Lutheran Church in Houston Texas to attend the annual Pastor, Teacher, Lay Delegate conference on January 21, and 22. There is room if more would like to attend. God willing your pastor will be preaching. Our Synod president also plans to attend. Many other representatives of our Synod and our Synodical schools will give reports. Papers will be delivered on the following subjects, 1. The Relevance of the Formula of Concord to Today's Continuing Reformation. 2. Worship in the 1500s...that we can still use today. 3. Exegesis of Psalm 46, 4. Isagogical Study of Josiah's Reign and Applications to Today's Continuing Reformation.

#### MONDAY NIGHT BIBLE CLASS

Monday night Bible class will begin again on January 4<sup>th</sup> and continue until Lent. We will meet at the church from 6:30PM to 8:30PM with a 15 minute coffee break. We shall examine themes such as, “Why should I believe the Bible?”, “Isn't religion discredited by science?”, “I can't handle your outdated view of sex”, “Don't you condemn homosexuals”, etc. Come and enjoy great fellowship around God's Word!

#### HOLY CROSS THANKSGIVING MEAL

Our Thanksgiving meal was a great success. Almost 70 people ate and most of them were visitors. Our worship service was also filled with visitors. We thank the many people who worked hard to make this a very special event.

#### VOTERS MEETING

The Holy Cross congregation annual voters body meeting will be held January 17<sup>th</sup>. This meeting will follow the Church Council meeting, which will be held January 12<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 PM. The church council meets to receive recommendations from each of the boards. From these recommendations the council prepares the agenda items for the voters meeting. The voters meeting will be held following the pot luck dinner after the worship service on Sunday, January 17<sup>th</sup>. Each board has been asked to make a report on their activities of the past year and their plans for the year 2010. So make plans to spend an hour taking part in the Lord's work.

#### NEWS LETTER CORRECTION

In the December news letter the officers and board member for the year 2010 were listed. Some of the members names were omitted from the board of property Management. Those serving on the board of property management are:

Duane Stuever

Shawn Stuever

Rick Poulin

Gerald Cartwright

Tom Finney

We apologize for any confusion this may have caused.

### MARY MARTHA

The ladies of Mary Martha met on December 12<sup>th</sup>. Their Bible study presented by Pastor Strackbein was a video of his trip to Israel. It was about a visit to Capernaum on the shore of the sea of Galilee. Pastor Kock, the tout leader, gave a sermon on Matthew who was a “man of means” who later became a “man of meaning”. Being a Christian also means being “people of meaning”. By the grace of God we are “people of meaning”. The disciples received more than what they gave up when they left their livelihood and followed Jesus.

Business items included discussions on the purchase of baptismal napkins, putting up and decorating the Christmas tree, and the purchase of a cross for the top of the Christmas tree. This was followed by discussions on the ladies Advent service at Gethsemane Lutheran church and providing Christmas meals for three families. The next Mary Martha ladies meeting will be held January 9<sup>th</sup> at 9:30 a.m.

### HOORAY FOR ICE CREAM

On December 21<sup>st</sup>, 30 children and adults toured the Braum’s dairy farm north of Tuttle, Oklahoma. They were given a presentation about the farm and what is involved in providing for and milking 10,000 cows. This was followed by a tour of how ice cream is made and packaged, milk processing and bottling, and other dairy manufacturing operations. The best part was when everyone was given a sample of the finished product, ice cream. So, if you have any questions or would like to know about the Braum’s dairy farm ask one of the Holy Cross children.

### PIONEER/YOUTH GROUP ACTIVITIES

The past months have been very busy for the Pioneer and Youth groups with trips, bowling, and other activities. 2010 promises to have more of the same. Plans are underway for Holy Cross and Gethsemane pioneers and youth groups to engage in a pine car derby. So start giving thoughts about how you can build a winning pine car. This may involve Mom and Dad helping in the design, building, and painting of the car. Watch the news letter and church bulletin board for more information and dates.

### ADVENT BY CANDLELIGHT

Over 70 ladies and girls from Gethsemane Lutheran Church and Holy Cross Lutheran church gathered at Gethsemane church to enjoy Advent worship and Christian fellowship on December 6<sup>th</sup>. The worship consisted of Bible readings, solo and group singing, and lighting of the advent candles. Following this the ladies and girls were served a large variety of desserts on tables decorated with china, silver, candles, and a beautiful centerpiece. Many thanks to all who made this peaceful break possible as we look forward to the coming of the savior!

### MY TENDER SHEPHERD

My tender Shepherd gently cares  
For His lost sheep, once gone astray;  
Far from His side, alone and bruised;  
Molested at a tender age.  
Scarred and crippled deep inside;  
Afraid to live; afraid to die!  
So gently led by His strong hand;  
Protected, all unknowingly  
Amid life's stormy, treacherous sea.  
Fed and nurtured by His Word  
Until at last the Light was shed!  
My Savior's voice, tho' far away  
Called lovingly to me and said,  
"Come unto Me and find your rest!"  
And now I'm safe, for at His side  
His voice is clear and comforting;  
All sin forgiven! For me He shed  
His precious blood that I might live;  
Here in time, abundantly;  
With Him at last, eternally!

By Delores Staats, (mother of Barbara Strackbein)

#### COMMON LITURGY QUESTIONS

*Why call the church God's house?*

We call the church building God's house in the special sense that it's been built and dedicated for the purpose of bringing God's Word and sacraments (Baptism and The Lord's Supper) to us, unlike any other building we know. Since we have come to God's house, we show special reverence for this place of worship. What is often misconstrued as reserve is actually reverence. We humble ourselves in the presence of God.

*Why all the standing and sitting?*

We stand at the close of the first hymn to show our respect for God and His presence. We are in the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords! After hearing God speak through His chosen prophets and apostles we rise out of respect that in the Gospel lesson we hear the very words Christ spoke as He lived among us. We ascend from listening to a servant of Jesus to the Word of the Lord Himself. We also generally stand when we make sacrifices to God as in the offering and prayers.

#### JUNGLE JOURNAL OCTOBER

The Jungle Journal is written by ELS missionary Terry Schultz in Peru

CAUTION: Contains very bizarre anthropological material.

## “BONES”

On the anniversary of his grandmother’s death, adult grandson Pedro got up early in order to visit her gravesite. (Grandmother had been like a mom to Pedro while he was growing up.)

Pedro put a rag into his pocket (for wiping down the stone marker) and added a little extra money in his coin purse to buy flowers from the lady in front of the cemetery.

Pedro nodded to the security guard as he passed through the cemetery’s old iron gate. As he approached Grandma’s marker however, Pedro immediately knew something was wrong. The ground at the grave plot looked like it had recently been turned over! Had someone been digging at Grandma’s grave? There was only one way to find out.

Pedro immediately went and fetched the security guard, exchanged heated words with him, and demanded a shovel. The guard unlocked a little shack, found an old shovel, tossed it to Pedro, and quickly left.

Energized by his anger, Pedro was soon dripping with sweat as he shoveled dirt from the gravesite. He was surprised at how quickly he hit the wood of Grandma’s casket. The casket was not as deep as Pedro remembered when he helped bury Grandma. He carefully removed a few more scoops of dirt and then tossed the shovel aside. Pedro knelt down in the shallow hole and, with his hand, wiped the remaining dirt off the top of the casket.

The lid of the casket had obviously been pried open not too long ago. It would offer little resistance now. Pedro took a deep breath, grabbed the lid, and opened the box.

Pedro was not completely startled at the macabre sight, for he had seen plenty of dead things during his life in the jungle. The remains of Grandma, darkened and dried with age, immediately reminded Pablo of how short the dear woman was. However, instead of feeling a touch of sadness over what lay in front of him, anger quickly welled up inside Pedro. Something was missing: Grandma’s head!

Someone had broken in and stolen Grandma’s skull.

Trafficking in bones is something of a cottage industry in certain areas of Peru, even in some outlying barrios of the capitol city of Lima. Cemetery guards sleeping at night may be awakened by passersby who tell them that a couple men are digging up a grave. Some Peruvians say that more often than not, it is the guards themselves who dig up the bodies at night to fill the many requests for bones, (primarily skulls, arm bones, and finger bones). Why would someone want to purchase a human bone? According to the folk religion beliefs of many mestizos and some indigenous tribes throughout the Peruvian jungle, human bones possess supernatural powers. In the riverport villages of the Amazon where we work, a brief list of potential buyers of human bones includes:

1. (Who else), Scorned Lovers. Let’s say a man starts cheating on his girlfriend. One day, the girlfriend finds out about it from her friends. That night, when the wayward boyfriend stops at his old girlfriend’s house, she offers him a glass of homemade alcohol. The boyfriend has no reason to suspect anything and gladly takes the drink. Little does he know that his furious soon-to-be ex-girlfriend dropped a finger bone into the bucket in which she prepared his drink. The boyfriend gulps down the drink as the girl walks out the door. She has extracted her

revenge: With just one glass of the supernaturally-changed drink, she has turned her former boyfriend into a senseless alcoholic. From that night on, he will not be able to go a single day without drinking. So the story goes.

In the jungle, so strong is the belief that dropping a human bone into homemade liquor can turn someone into an alcoholic that, not surprisingly, another category of bone buyers is:

2. Bar Owners. Some say that if you ask for a drink in a jungle bar, you better take a careful look at the bottle the bartender is pouring from. Bar owners are among the most eager purchasers of finger bones. A finger bone dropped into a bottle of liquor means that the one who purchases a drink from the bottle will immediately turn into an alcoholic. What could be better for business?

3. Finally, an obvious customer for human bones is the shaman. In certain areas of Peru, shamans possess a scepter-like stick which is strung with magical stones and animal bones, and has a human skull stuck on the top. When the shaman arrives and sits down on the ground for a ritual, he may stick the skull-topped stick in the dirt on one side of him, set out the statue of a catholic saint at his other side, and arrange other paraphernalia in front of him as he prepares for his occult activities.

The human skull on the shaman's stick represents several things to people. It is meant to demonstrate that the shaman has no fear of death, but rather has power over the dead. The skull indicates that the shaman has made a pact with various spirits in the spirit realm. (It does not mean that the shaman has a pact with the spirit of the previous owner of the skull.) The skull reminds people of the shaman's (supposed) power to transport his spirit into the spirit world. There he receives hidden knowledge from his spirit contacts, or directs the spirits to use their powers for good or evil.

Of course, when new church members from the jungle find themselves with access to human bones, they sometimes attempt to "syncretize" their old folk religion ways with the new teachings of Christianity. This leads to all sorts of confusion which must be confronted and corrected by our pastors. Take the example of one of our members from the mestizo village of Pelejo. We'll call him Juan (to protect his privacy).

One day, Juan was fishing on a small jungle river when he spotted a human skull bobbing in the water near the riverbank. Mind you, with all the drug trafficking, terrorism, and other types of mayhem that occur out here where the police don't go, a body or skull washed up on a riverbank is not a totally surprising sight. Juan grabbed the skull, put it in his dugout, and hurried home.

Juan brought the skull into the house and showed it to his wife. Luna (name changed) did not like the skull one bit. However, Juan assured her that by looking at the teeth, he had discovered that the skull came from a Christian! Juan set the skull up in the bamboo rafters of their thatch roof above the cooking area, while informing Luna and their two kids that the Christian skull would guard the house from evil spirits and thieves.

However, the skull, which was in easy view from the kitchen table, was freaking Luna out. When the occasional snake still showed up in the kitchen or the bedroom, Luna informed Juan that the skull was powerless and of no real use. Besides, she insisted, it was not a Christian thing to have around. Luna finally demanded that Juan get rid of the skull. Juan took the skull

down but wasn't sure what to do with it. He knew Luna strongly disapproved of him selling it, (even though there would be no lack of eager buyers in the village). Luna just wanted him to get rid of it. Juan told his non-churchgoing bachelor brother Sid about his dilemma. Sid offered an easy solution: Why not just quietly sell the skull to him? Juan thought that was a great idea. So, Sid gave Juan 10 dollars for the skull and took it over to his house.

And what did Sid do with the skull?

Sid placed the skull on his narrow, single bed. According to Sid, if you are not afraid to sleep at night with a human skull right beside you, it increases your courage. Now several weeks later, Sid says he has turned into a braver person.

Thanks to Juan's story, Tarapoto Pastor Ronal and I decided to carefully teach our Amazon congregations about the error of assuming power automatically resides in bones and craniums. The devil and the demons, working through the mysterious props and paraphernalia of the shamans, love to produce fear, confusion, and occult fascination among our villagers. What better response to magic props could be found than that of the new Christians in Ephesus who, living in the occult epicenter of their region, decided to publicly burn their little scrolls upon which were written magic phrases. (See Acts 19.)

Lord, help us bring about a similar response from our members, with the destruction of amulets and occult paraphernalia that pervade the Amazon jungle!

Until next time amigos,

Terry