

Live up to the Light you have, and more will be given you.

When you were little, did you ever play a game with your friends in which you imagined you had supernatural powers? Or what you might ask for if you were given three wishes? My first wish was to be rich. My second wish for world peace. (At the time, I was actually indifferent about world peace, but there was a cute girl in my group of friends and I wanted to appear virtuous.) My third wish, of course, was for more wishes.

It would have been interesting to have kept track of our three wishes to see how they changed over the years. My first wish today would be different. I appreciate having sufficient funds, but today I wouldn't waste a wish on money. I'd want my hair back. Then world peace. Then more wishes.

I suspect most of our wishes and priorities would change, that our perspectives have changed in light of our life experience. I think this happened with Jesus, too. Do you remember his first miracle? John the gospel writer didn't call it a miracle, but a sign, done to demonstrate his authority.

What was that sign, his first demonstration of authority? Did he heal a sick child? Did he feed crowds of people? Did he intervene in a conflict and cause enemies to love one another? No, according to the Gospel of John, he turned water into wine at a wedding party in Cana. John tried to put a spin on it, tried to spiritualize it. He called it a manifestation of glory, but it doesn't change the fact that Jesus' first use of power was to make alcohol for people who were probably already drunk.

It is only told about in John's Gospel, in the second chapter. Perhaps Mark, Matthew, and Luke didn't think it reflected well on Jesus, so left it out. Perhaps it didn't happen. Or perhaps John created the story to illustrate a theological point. That wasn't unusual in a culture which used stories to convey great truths. And it would be like John. There are several extraordinary Jesus-stories—the raising of Lazarus being another—that appear only in John's Gospel and nowhere else.

But doesn't it sound like the kind of thing someone might do if they were inexperienced with the exercise of power and hadn't yet given it a lot of thought? In any event, his stock seems to have risen among his disciples. John notes that afterward, "his disciples believed in him."

Afterwards, John says, Jesus walked to Capernaum. It was 20 miles from Cana to Capernaum. A fair distance. A lot of time to think. Of course, we can't know what Jesus thought about. John doesn't tell us. But I imagine Jesus used that time to think about the kind of things we all think about. What kind of life will I live? What kind of person will I be? What is my calling? What will I do with my life? He was probably hoping to be more than a winemaker.

I remember when Joan and I were first married and the economy was bad, so I had to cobble together a bunch of little jobs, one of which was making milkshakes at the state fair. I sold milkshakes all day to people who didn't need them. It was depressing. My co-workers were high school kids earning gas money. I was 25 working to pay rent. The only way I got through it was to keep reminding myself I wasn't going to spend the rest of my life making milkshakes.

I complained about it to my mom. She said, "We all have to start somewhere." That might have been what Jesus's mother told him. When she told him the wine was running low, he said, "Why's that my business?" Which you should never say to your mother. She probably said, "Hey, you have to start somewhere."

So Jesus makes the wine, but he can't get away from there fast enough. He left Cana, went to Capernaum, then to Jerusalem where he "cleansed the Temple," then met up with John the Baptist, went to Samaria, returned to Galilee, then went back to Cana, the scene of his first sign. People remember him, of course. You turn water into wine and people will remember you. But one thing is clear to him now. He's done making wine. He's moving on to higher work. There is an official of the city, whose little boy is near death. He comes to Jesus and pleads with him to heal his son. Jesus thinks, "Now this is what I was born to do." And he healed the boy. John wrote of that event, "This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee."

Now think of the material and spiritual difference between those two signs. The first was a fraternity trick. It weighs on Jesus. He thinks there surely must be a higher purpose to his life than that. The second sign reflects his growing sensitivity, his emerging awareness. He does the most beautiful, virtuous, noble thing a person could ever do. He saves the life of a child.

We've been thinking about Quaker sayings. This morning's saying is from a Quaker woman named Caroline Fox, who at the age of 21 in 1840, consumed with depression and anxiety and a sense of failure, went to meeting for worship where she had a great spiritual insight.

That evening she wrote in her journal, “I seemed to hear the words articulated in my spirit, ‘Live up to the light thou hast, and more will be granted thee.’”

Live up to the light you have, and more will be given you.

Don’t we always want more? Don’t we always want more peace of mind, more insight, more awareness, more wisdom, more kindness, the ability to do more good? Don’t we always want to aim a little higher? When the boys do something Joan thinks is beneath them, she will say, “Let’s aim a little higher.” They repeat it along with her now, “We know Mom. We should aim a little higher.” Don’t we all want to aim a little higher?

Now let us suppose that at least one of Jesus’s callings was to show us what it meant to be human, that among his many tasks and responsibilities, he was called to model what it meant to be fully human, with all of its challenges and triumphs. If so, doesn’t it stand to reason that he, like us, also had to grow in awareness, also had to grow in sensitivity and wisdom? The Bible itself says “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature.”

Perhaps the reason Jesus lived and loved at the level he did was because he made a habit of living up to the light he had, so more was given him. In being faithful to the small tasks given him, he was equipped for larger matters.

I suspect the vast differences between Jesus's first sign and his second sign reflected his growing desire to aim higher, to become more deliberate about living up to the light he had, so more light, more understanding, more awareness, more discernment, more power to love, would be given him. Now if Jesus is our model for living, this begs the question: Are we living up to the light we've been given? Are we faithful to that which we know to be good and wise and gracious and lovely? Are we living up to the light we've been given? No matter how small the task.

I met an interesting woman the other day. She'd lost her job this past year, as is the case with so many folks these days. The first several weeks, she sat around her house feeling sorry for herself. Then she heard about a family where both the husband and wife had lost their jobs and were out of money. Her husband still had a job, so she began to think, "Hey, I'm pretty lucky." That was more light given her, you see. A growing awareness. She decided to help that family get money. She raised a few hundred dollars for them and it felt really good. More light.

Then she started thinking about all the other families in her town who were in the exact same situation and she decided to raise money for all of them so they could get something for their children for Christmas. Even more light. I met her in a store. She'd set up a booth and was selling Charley Brown Christmas trees she'd made. She'd organized the people on her block to help. Called themselves the Blockheads. Now she is awash in light, flooded with light. They're going to make sure every kid in her town gets clothing and a toy for Christmas. I had to give her all my money before I could leave. That little tree cost me \$40.

Isn't it almost always the case that awareness about small concerns, makes us eventually sensitive to larger matters? But we start small. We live up to the small light we've been given first. Wine, milkshakes, helping one person. Then more is given us.

But we start small. If we're going to teach our children to love their enemies, we don't start with Hitler. We start with the ignored child in their kindergarten class and teach them to love and include that child. We teach them to live up to that light, knowing more light will be given them as their capacity for faithfulness, wisdom, and grace expands. I think that was true for Jesus. I believe it is true for us. Live up to the light you have, and more will be given you.