

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

February 2011

Dearest Friends,

I wanted to share with you something from my journals, and something I recently discovered in the Gospels. Last summer we had a chance to spend some time at the coast. Here is what I wrote:

I am sitting on the beach this evening, watching the swells roll in towards me. Each wave builds as it approaches, ascending, taking shape, deep greens below sweeping upward into aquamarine. A sculpture in motion. The sheer elegance is enough to take my breath away.

The wave I was watching crashed, but another kept rushing to take its place, sweeping upward, forward, utterly mesmerizing beauty. Then another, then another, and another, in an unending processional. I began to wonder:

What are the waves telling us about Jesus?

An artist is revealed in the work they create, and in the abundance of work they create. Think of the ocean. Picture it in your mind. What does this tell us about Jesus? What words come to mind? Majestic, powerful, wild, dangerous. Yes, tempestuous, like the clearing of the Temple. But also gently playful as it laps at your feet, swirling round your toes, pulling the sand away from beneath you as Jesus ever so gently pulls the rug out from under us.

I looked down. Scattered at my feet lay a thousand shells, delicate, intricate, the work of a jeweler. An artist with very small tools and exceptional eyesight. If all this is the work of an artist's hand, what does it tell us about the artist? Most of all, I am thunderstruck by the abundant generosity strewn around, constantly rolling in. It's as if someone took the family silver and ran down the beach, tossing handfuls here and there like a madman. How do you describe this extravagance? What kind of person acts like this???

Then I looked again at the story of Jesus turning water into wine:

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." (John 2:1-4)

His response to Mary seems rude, but that cannot be – we know he adored her. My goodness, while hanging in agony from the cross he arranges for her care. There couldn't have been anything condescending in his reply, for she simply turns to the servants and says, like a Jewish mother,

"Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said,

“Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.” This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. (vs 5-11)

Six water jars holding up to thirty gallons each. One hundred and eighty gallons (John makes the point of saying that the jars were filled “to the brim”). One hundred and eighty gallons equals about 682 liters. That would be 908 bottles of wine.

I know, I know – it is almost too much to believe. It seems too extravagant. But the scripture makes a point of telling us exactly how many urns there were, how much they held, and even pushes the point that they were filled to the brim. Apparently, the quantity Jesus produced is important to the story, and I’m certainly not going to begrudge Jesus the right to be generous.

John says, “He thus revealed his glory.” What is it, exactly, that Jesus thus revealed? Certainly his power over creation. But there is something else here, something beautiful. Jesus did not provide cheap wine – as the maitre d’ expected, given the lateness of the hour. Nor did he make a statement by substituting grape juice. He didn’t just give them a little wine, say, a dozen bottles to wrap up the evening with one last toast. Jesus does it lavishly. To the tune of 908 bottles. Here is the same stunning generosity we see pouring forth in creation.

O, the beauty of Jesus.

Among the many things that get assaulted in our hearts towards God is his generosity. His goodness. But recently I’ve been struck simply by sunshine. Think about it – what daily radiance is showered upon us, what immense golden goodness. Every single day. What does sunshine tell us about the personality of Jesus? Or water? Or air?

Then I noticed how much he gave of himself, all through the Gospels. Late into the night, early in the morning, walking down the road, in the middle of his supper, at home, abroad, Jesus offers. His time, his words, his touch, flowing like the wine at Cana. To appreciate the reality of it all, remember this is not Superman. Remember his loneliness, his weariness, his humanity. This is utterly remarkable – particularly in light of the fact that this is a man on a life-or-death mission. He is lavish with himself.

O Jesus, forgive me for doubting this. Open the floodgates between us, and give me more of yourself. That is what I want. I want more of you.

Don’t you?

Offered in love,


John

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