“It’s a Miracle! What is a Miracle?”

John 2:1-11

Rev. John Hill          December 3, 2006

Have you heard of the Blue Collar Comedy guys? It’s a group of four comedians—Jeff Foxworthy, Ron White, Larry the Cable Guy, and Bill Engrall. Each one of them has a routine that makes them unique. Jeff Foxworthy and “you might be a redneck if…”. Ron White and his English bulldog, Sluggo. Larry the Cable Guy and “Git ‘R Done”. And Bill Engrall and “Here’s Your Sign”.

What Bill Engrall means by “Here’s Your Sign” is that people should wear a sign that says, “I’m stupid” because we all ask questions and make comments that prove that we may not be as smart as we think we are. And here are a few of his examples.

He and his wife were packing to move, so his house was full of boxes and there was a moving truck out in front of his home. His neighbor comes over and asked “Are you moving?” And Bill said, “Nope, we just pack up our stuff once or twice a week to see how many boxes it will take. Here’s your sign.”

He had a flat tire and he pulled over to the side of the road. Someone stopped and asked, “Your tire go flat?” And Bill said, “No, I was driving and the other three swelled up on me. Here’s your sign.”

He stayed late at work one day and a co-worker came by and said, “Are you still here?” And Bill said, “Nope, I left 10 minutes ago. Here’s your sign.”

But Bill also confesses that he does the same thing. He was in a parking lot one day and he saw a guy putting a coat hanger in the car window. So Bill asked, “You lock your keys in the car?” And the guy said, “No, I just washed it and I’m hanging it up to dry.”

Here’s your sign.

Signs do make life easier. They help us to know where we are, where we need to go, what we need to do…

And they can also remind us that none of us is quite as smart as we think we are.

This morning in the passage from the Gospel of John we heard (and saw) the story of Jesus turning water into wine. And the passage ended with this statement: “Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana of Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in Him.”

The Greek word that is translated as MIRACLE is SEMEION (say-mi’-on), and it literally means “an indication”. And the way to translate it is “a sign”. In almost every case in the New Testament—especially the Gospel of John—a miracle is a sign…it is an indication of something—it points to something else.

So what is a miracle? It is a sign. Jesus never performed a miracle just to amaze people…he didn’t perform miracles just to show off what he could do. Miracles are always a sign that give us an indication of where we are and they point us to where we need to go.

A miracle is a sign that tells us where we are.

The first thing that a miracle tells us about where we are is that we live in a world where God is present.

I think many people understand miracles as an event where God enters into the world and violates the laws of nature in order to accomplish his will. We think of miracles as being super natural—as something outside the natural order of things.

St. Augustine said, “…we say that all portents (miracles), are contrary to nature; but they are not so. For how is that contrary to nature which happens by the will of God, since the
will of so mighty a creator is certainly the nature of each created thing? A portent (miracle), therefore, happens not contrary to nature, but contrary to what we know as nature.”

A miracle is a sign that points to God and his presence in our world and in our everyday ordinary lives.

We are here—surrounded by the presence of God.

A miracle is also a sign that reminds us that we aren’t quite as smart as we think we are. Just because we think we have everything about nature and natural laws all figured out, we don’t. God doesn’t act contrary to the laws of nature, just contrary to what we know. I do want to be really clear. I’m not saying that there is a logical and natural explanation for miracles. I am saying that God, who is the creator of nature, is always free to do something here—something we might think is outside the laws of nature. But God is not bound by our laws—God is a God who does new things—unique things—extraordinary things.

So miracles remind us that we are limited people and our knowledge is limited and there is still so much for us to learn and discover.

Miracles not only indicate where we are, but they also point us to where we need to go.

Miracles point us to God and the appropriate response is to believe. In the passage from John it says, “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee… and his disciples believed…”

Jesus performed miracles so that people would believe in him—so that they would believe that he was God in their midst.

Later in the Gospel of John, after Jesus miraculously feed the 5000 people with the five loaves of bread and two fish, the people came to him and he said:

“Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves…” (John 6:26)

The purpose of miracles isn’t to satisfy our physical needs or our physical desires, but instead they are to point us to God. And our response is to believe.

Miracles not only point us to God, they also point us to where we need to go.

In the passage from the Gospel of John we heard about how 120 to 160 gallons of water were changed into wine. And this water was from the jars that were used for the Jewish rite of purification. It was water that was used to wash your hands and face as a way of symbolizing your cleansing for sin and your purity before God.

In Psalm 24:4, we hear: “…who shall stand in God’s holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts…”

But Jesus changes that water with wine…it is no longer water, it is really good wine. For me, the point is that this new wine cleanses us in new ways...in better ways. It’s not just an external washing—it is an internal transformation.

In his miracles, Jesus points us to our need to be changed. Our need to be transformed.

Our need to become the people God created us to be.

We are not where we should be—so Jesus points us in the direction we are to go.

The miracle of the transformation of water into wine is a sign of our need for transformation.

And in the Gospel of John, this is a story that points us to the meaning of the Sacrament of Communion and the message that our lives can be transformed by the grace of God.