

“WATER, NOT VINEGAR”

Pastor Mike Corwin

TEXT: REVELATION 21:1-8

GOD’S WORD: JOHN 19:28-30

I – RESTAURANTS:

How many of you believe in a jinx? You know...when you have a continued run of bad luck in a particular area of your life? I believe that I am jinxed when it comes to eating out. Let me explain.

I quit eating fast food, like McDonalds or Wendy’s, years ago. It wasn’t because of being on a healthy diet or anything like that; it was because of the jinx. No matter how many times I went, no matter how many times I tried, it always turned out the same way. I would go to the window, I would order my food, I would pay and take my sack and drive away. As I opened the sack to get my dinner I would soon discover that I did not have what I ordered. They always got it wrong. I could order for six people and the other 5 would get what they ordered, but mine would always be wrong. I pretty much have ceased eating at restaurants for the same reason. No matter what I order it comes out wrong! I have even set at the table with members of my family and watched them get and eat their food and mine never even gets served! I’m not making this up – ask my wife or children or grandchildren and they’ll verify all this for you. I’m jinxed!

I’m guessing that all of you can tell me similar stories. That what you asked for wasn’t what you received. That what you ordered wasn’t what got delivered. That what you needed wasn’t provided. And I’m guessing most if not all of you have the same reaction of disgust, anger, or the feeling of being let down as you send it back to the kitchen or mail it back to the company, or return it to the store. All you want is to get what you asked for! To receive what you need! You don’t want substitutes – you want the real thing.

II – VINEGAR:

If I feel let down and irritated over something as trivial as food service, I can only begin to understand how Jesus must have felt when he didn’t get what he asked for. Let’s go back to the crucifixion story and look at the piece you heard read this morning.

Jesus is nearing the end of his ministry. It is the end of Holy Week, the end of The Passion story. He has been arrested in the garden. He has been thrown around and assaulted by the Temple guards as he was drug before the Chief priests and religious rulers. He has been handed over to

the Roman authorities who took him to the courtyard, stripped his clothes off, and then beat him without mercy until you could see the bones and muscles exposed through the skin. He has had a robe draped over him and a crown of thorns forced into this head as the soldiers mocked him, spit on him, and sarcastically called him a king. He has stood in front of his own people as the blood dripped from his back and his head and heard them yell for his death. He has been marched up a hill and nailed to a cross and lifted in to the air between two criminals to die.

As he hangs on to life by a thread he looks down at his tormentors and says, "I Thirst." He asks for a drink. Because of the blood loss he had suffered, because of the nervous tension that must have been coursing through him, and because of his exposure to the hot sun, he had a raging thirst and asked for a drink. Here's where I see an act of degradation that didn't need to be done to a dying man. Instead of giving him water, the source of life, they give him vinegar to quicken his death. The vinegar was a soured wine. It once had been good but had turned bad and had turned to vinegar. It was given to people on the cross because it was a strong astringent. It caused the throat muscles to contract so the condemned victim couldn't cry out in pain and made breathing harder. Instead of prolonging his life, they hastened his death.

III – WATER OR VINEGAR?:

As I looked at the scripture I used "God's Word" this week I found myself pondering the question of how many times has someone come to the Church of Jesus Christ looking for the water of life and instead has received vinegar. They came looking for life and instead were shown death. We identified Jesus early in lent as the Water of Life, but do we treat him and the Gospel this way? I think this is a serious question that deserves some serious thought.

I'm not speaking about this or any one church in particular, but The Church in general. I have to wonder...

- How many people have come looking for the water of love but received the vinegar of hate?
- How many people have come looking for the water of acceptance but received the vinegar of prejudice or bias?
- How many people have come looking for the water of truth but received the vinegar of deceit?
- How many have come looking for the water of truth but received the vinegar of lies?
- How many have come looking for the water of trust but received the vinegar of deception?
- How many have come looking for the water of hope but have received the vinegar of despair?
- How many have come looking for the water of belonging but have received the vinegar of indifference?
- How many come looking for the water of freedom but receive the vinegar of oppression?

And the list could go on and on but the point is this, People come to the church to find the Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love of Jesus Christ, to find and learn about the Living Water, but sometimes they find vinegar. Sometimes the Church forgets what it's here for and their well runs dry. They allow the Gospel to sour.

IV – TEXT:

And that's a huge problem! The church is supposed to lead people to life...not death. The importance of our task can be found in this passage from the book of Revelation...

REVELATION 21:1-8 (NLT)

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." ⁵And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" And then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true." ⁶And he also said, "It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. ⁷All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. ⁸"But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

God created a perfect world and then evil entered in by the actions of humans. Sin and death entered in because of our disobedience and the earth became imperfect because of our rebellion. The vision given to John tells us that this will someday be taken care of. The day will come when God will say enough is enough and Jesus will return and the world will be put back into God's perfection.

The entire world will become God's Holy City and God will live there with his people who will be loyal and committed solely to him as he has demanded all along. Just as a husband and wife are joined in love and purity, God will be joined to his people for all of eternity. He will wipe away their tears as he removes death and sorrow, crying and pain. Nothing will ever again distort God's perfection.

He told John to write it down, to proclaim it, it will be the completion of the story he started in the Garden of Eden.

And then the message the church needs to remember and relearn. God is in control of the waters of life. He says he gives it freely to everyone who is thirsty. He sent his one and only Son, Jesus, to proclaim that he was the Water of Life and anyone who drank from this water would never be thirsty again. God says that anyone who finds and drinks this water will be his children and will inherit all the blessings of Salvation and eternal life he has promised. But those who don't receive and drink the water will perish. Those who would rather have vinegar instead of water will be cast into the fiery pits of hell.

The church needs to remember they are the carriers of this living water. They have been entrusted and commanded to give it to everyone, to share it. Those who drink will be with us in this New Jerusalem with God, those who don't will spend eternity in hell.

V – WATER, NOT VINEGAR:

The way you treat others as representatives of the church could well determine whether they receive the water of life or the vinegar of death. The very way you look at, talk to, or act towards someone who walks through these doors, or that you encounter on the street, could very well determine their eternal life or their eternal death. You may well hold the eternal fate of a loved one, a friend, a neighbor, or a complete stranger in your hands and your heart. You must ask yourself the question this morning whether you give people water or vinegar.

We continued to take in new members during Covid and I'm hoping they decided to join because they've received the water of the Gospel here as lived out by this Faith community. I charge you all with continuing to make sure the water of life flows freely from our mouths and our hearts. You also witnessed the baptism of a baby and his brothers last Sunday as you have many times before. In each case you as a congregation promised to love that child and help raise him or her to be a follower of Jesus. You promised to make sure you always give them water and never give them vinegar. You promised for each member and for each baptism that you will see to it they are treated in such a way that they will inherit the Kingdom of God with you.

I charge you this day to make sure that water of life flows freely not only to those who you have accepted as part of your faith community, but to make sure the fountain of Salvation bubbles so strongly that it can't be contained by this well we call Bucyrus UMC, but that it overflows and drenches this city. I charge you today with the task of making sure you give everyone water...never vinegar.

AMEN