

#9 15-16

Psalm 36:5-10

Isaiah 62:1-5

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11

Our Gifts, for Joy

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it.

When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now."

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

THIS IS THE WORD OF OUR LORD . . .

This first act of Jesus coming into his public ministry is different in each Gospel. In Matthew his first act was the Sermon on the Mount, in Mark, he performed an exorcism, in Luke, which we will hear next week, Jesus reveals himself in the synagogue after reading from prophecy. It is interesting and telling what each writer thought was important to emphasize as Jesus' first public act introducing himself to the world as a prophet, son of God, Messiah

. . .

John being the more mystically oriented Gospel, the one that is so different from the other three, it is no surprise that he begins Jesus' story with something as jovial as a wedding. I can almost see this story being told as a sitcom.

Jesus' Mom (I will not say Mary, because, interestingly enough, in John's Gospel, His mother is only mentioned twice, by title and no name ~ the second time is at the cross): Jesus! OMG!! They are out of wine! The poor dears! This is a Schanda! You gotta do that thing you do!

Jesus: Woman! This is not the time for this!

Mom: (Gives stern Mom face) See this face?! (Looks to servants)

You there, you guys! Just do whatever it is that this guy tells you to do . . .

Done and done!

So, the miracle of the wine has been recorded by John as Jesus' introduction to the world. The jugs which had been used as part of the Jewish ritual for *cleansing* have been turned into the finest wine - something better than the best that was offered already by the universe!

Our tradition now accepts the idea of wine being the blood of Christ, so in this telling of the Jesus tale, this author gives us the introduction that basically has Jesus' Mom pressuring him to do his thing, and he does it, and he does glorious things! He saves a wedding, AND he replaces his faith tradition with a ministry that is far more intimate and grace filled.

The goal of Jesus' ministry is that we may have life, and joy, and hope, and have it abundantly! Let us never forget this! For we are a Body of Christ! And our communal life is to be, and offer others, an abundant life of joy and hope! Trusting in the power of Jesus, allowing ourselves to be nudged as Mary did, believing that the goal of life is joy.

Now, this is Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday celebration weekend; so I would be remiss if I were not to mention his. David and I joined some others in Baltimore yesterday for the regional celebration! These kind of

celebrations are important to remind ourselves of how far we have yet to go in peace and justice, and to encourage us to continue the good struggle for justice. Our intentional acts to overcome our own fears and to seek out those places where our hearts and minds own false stories, this is what shows to us and others that there is a sacred element in our psyche. Intentionally putting a light on the parts of our lives that we want to hide in shame, as Mary intentionally introduced Jesus to heal that which was wrong.

Running out of wine is a small thing, not like facing our prejudices or our false notions of what truth is; but the solution is the same. If we can impart some of the lessons we have inherited of Christ's teachings into information we have in our brain vessels - we might find our old truths to be transformed into amazing, joyous, hopeful, gracious, sacred truths!

Better yet, if we could trust that we have some Holiness in us! We will be able to do far more than we could ever imagine!

We have been told that we all have some gifts, given to us by God through the Holy Spirit. I hope everyone here knows this and believes it! We do! Our little bit of sacred Godliness is there! And our calling is to trust in the Holy Spirit and to help our sacred gifts grow. From our Epistle reading, in 1 Corinthians, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." How much time and energy do we spend as individuals and as a church, trying to discover our gifts, nurture them so they could grow?

If this adventure into our personal and communal spiritual growth were to be the goal of each one of us for one year - we would look back on this year in total awe. We need to communally commit to discovering the miracles of Christ in us. Let us nudge each other as Jesus' Mom did, to do the acts we need to do in order to experience the full power of the Holy Spirit. Let us commit to spending time discovering our SPIRITUAL gifts and to nurture them. Because when we do so, when we focus on them, and the goal of justice, awareness and compassion - this brings joy to others and to ourselves. It brings hope to the universe!

Let us not forget what kind of a life the Man we call our Savior, our Lord, our Messiah - Jesus - asked us to commit to! He called us to love him more than our own families, to leave our personal priorities, like Oxen, behind, and to go into the world to do his Will. He called us to take up the cross and follow him, to feed his sheep, visit those in jail, give hope to the hopeless!

But as we were reminded yesterday in Baltimore, perhaps the Church has been too focused on self preservation than for being drum majors for justice. Perhaps the Church has been too fear based to lead courageous lives exercising our gifts and trusting in the God, through the Holy Spirit to create lasting power changes in this world.

Every day we are faced with news that can be so discouraging. The violence and the vitriol! And it seems like profane ungodly thoughts come out of our world leader's mouths and they are celebrated not condemned! The spirit that is in the souls of those who curse God's creations based on their nationality or their religion is NOT of God! And if you spend enough time being aware of these people, it may feel like they are taking over the world. But we in the church are called to manifest a different world! A world of action for compassion! A world of Gifts for joy! For there can be no joy when someone is being maligned. There can be no joy when there is fear based on skin color. And our task is to create joy! Create in this world a place where the POWER of God can be realized! A power for joy and a TRUST in the sacred life given to us!

There where we live in our gifts and our trust in God, we will see miracles! Miracles as clear as turning water into wine! A wine that is more profound and meaningful than anything else we have ever experienced in our world!

So the question is - are we ready to put our scriptures to the test? Are we ready to test the words and actions of Christ against our own belief system and then to take steps in faith to discover the miracles of God? We cannot experience a miracle if we don't let go and make the adventure into our sacred selves, and walk into the world trusting the Holy! Are we ready for a 2016 filled with wonder?