

# Sermon: Epiphany 2

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Year C

Isaiah 62:1-5

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Psalm 36:5-10

John 2:1-11

Today's reading from Isaiah reminds us of what we need to hear... the Lord delights in us... and our land shall be married... no more shall our be named Forsaken... our land shall no more be called Desolate... like Jacob wrestling with an angel and being renamed Israel... Zion is given a new identity in it's relationship with God... and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride... so shall our God rejoice over us... it's a reading full of wedding imagery...

And in 1 Corinthians... God's generosity pours out in an intoxicating list of gifts of the Spirit... gifts which too many of us tend to minimize... or diminish... because we were taught not to puff ourselves up... not to promote ourselves... not to be too egotistic...

But the kind of self-awareness that allows us to discern our gifts... to know what we're good at... and what we're not... the kind of self-awareness that is part of our formation... is the kind of awareness we gain from true humility... when we know ourselves fully...

We are sloshing in grace... but sometimes we can't see the forest for the trees... sometimes it takes someone else to re-name us... by naming the gifts we ourselves can't see...

But Mary sees that they have run out of wine... and Jesus' response seems like no way for a Jewish boy to speak to his mother... *Woman... what concern is that to you and to me...* but this is one of those stories... where there are multiple truths... many of us hear Jesus chastising Mary... but underneath his words... there is revelation and enlightenment...

John Shea has written that Mary represents humanity aware of its lack... conscious that it cannot live to the fullest without continual communion with God... so she speaks to Jesus... the God side of the divine-human relationship... the haunting and poignant words of all human insufficiency... they have no wine... humans have lost their union with God and... by implication... their communion with one another...

When Jesus addresses his mother as Woman... he recognizes her as Eve... the mother of the living... who cares for her children and who is responsible to seek their well-being... and when Jesus asks her... how the imperiled humanity she represents... is connected to God whom he embodies... *what concern is that to you and to me*... it is a question that sets up the revelation of his glory... it is a question designed to bring divine abundance into the world of human lack... Shea wrote... the answer to Jesus' question is everything... the very reason for Jesus' being is to supply wine for the imperiled marriage of divine and human life...

In Exodus 19... God says to Moses... *Now therefore... tell the Israelites... if you keep my covenant... you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. So Moses came... summoned the elders of the people... and set before them the words that the Lord had commanded him. And the people answered as one: Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.*

His mother said to the servants... *Do whatever he tells you*... and Jesus turned almost 180 gallons of water into the best wine...

There's a problem with how the water has turned in Flint, Michigan... the city manager... trying to save some money... decided to stop buying water from Detroit... sold the pipes that connected Flint to Detroit's water supply... and started pumping corrosive water from the Flint River... water that leached lead out of the pipes... and carried it into the mouths of Flint's 100,000 residents... even though the government had been warned a year ago that the levels were too high... they said *Go ahead... drink*

*the water... it's fine...* the desires of the few have hurt the health of many... but I doubt the people in Flint want the river turned into fine wine... I think they'd settle for clean drinking water...

Three days ago... at a meeting of Presiding Bishops at Canterbury Cathedral... God's welcome was diverted... turned aside... a two third's vote called for the Episcopal Church to be suspended from full participation in the life and work of the Anglican Communion... this means that the Episcopal Church is not permitted to represent the Communion in interfaith and ecumenical bodies or dialogue commissions... not to serve on the Standing Committee of the Consultative Council... not to vote at any meetings of the Council... and not to take part in the decision making process "on issues of doctrine or polity."

This happened because many African Presiding Bishops dislike the welcome and inclusion that the Episcopal Church offers... dislike that the Episcopal Church offers all the sacraments to all the people... that in June... the marriage rite was extended to same-gender couples...

But a key element of Anglicanism... is that one Province... and there are 38... cannot tell another Province how to do things.... they simply don't have the authority to make pronouncements... or enforce sanctions... this is the way it's always been and always will be... so the vote was... to quote Shakespeare... one that struts and frets its hour upon the stage... and then is heard no more... it is a tale told by an idiot... full of sound and fury... signifying nothing... and the Episcopal church will continue to do what it's doing...

In some ways... those who voted for this outcome... want to dole out tainted river water... in some ways... they don't want the limited welcome they offer to be changed into radical inclusion... they don't want to turn ordinary water into gallons of fine wine... into the best that God has to offer...

The changing of water into fine wine... was the first of Jesus' signs... his hour may not have come... he did not yet get his wine-soaked sponge offered up to him... but the miracle recounted here... is greater than simply changing water into wine... the miracle is that when there is need... when the haunting and poignant words of all human insufficiency are spoken... they have no wine... God hears and has the best waiting for us... ready for us... we're the ones who erect walls and barriers... cost-cutting shortcuts that hurt others... votes that exclude instead of ones that reflect God's welcome...

There's another passage from Isaiah 25 about wine that I like... *On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food... a feast of well-aged wines... strained clear.* This is not the cheap wine... not the wine you serve last... but the wine you serve to those you love... the kind of wine God serves to the humanity God loves... to the humanity God marries...

What I think is interesting to note... is that the water that was turned into wine... was first put into six stone jars that would hold water for the rites of purification... an acknowledgment even then... that we still need more purification... but the best wine that God has to offer... comes before we are pure... it comes... not out of our works... but out of God's love...

The text suggests that our three-dimensional understanding of life in this world... with its painful limitations... has been unpredictably invaded by grace... and when that happens... we may not recognize it... we may reject it... we may even think it's not of God... the text may suggest this because our senses are dulled... we still see through a mirror dimly... and we mistake fine wine for cheap wine...

Today's Epistle... recounts some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit... but we tend to diminish them... we tend to diminish what we're good at... like the utterance of wisdom... the utterance of knowledge... faith... gifts of healing... the working of miracles... prophecy... catching and releasing squirrels... coordinating funeral receptions...

washing dishes... vacuuming and cleaning... sending out greeting cards... caring for this table... scheduling servers... visiting the sick... baking communion bread... taking people to appointments... collecting food... bagging and distributing diapers... teaching English... all according to the same Spirit...

You see... what God offers us... may seem like ordinary water... but it's wine... and even so... the best is yet to come...

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