

Epiphany 2 C

Isaiah 62:1-5

Psalms 36:5-10

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11

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Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, Edmonton
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Grace and peace to you.

Most often weddings and wine go together, and with the expense of weddings, a miracle like this one would be a welcome addition! John portrays a story of abundance, beauty and grace where Jesus colludes with wine and water to ensure the wedding celebrations continue.

Did you know that John's gospel is the only one with this story? The first miracle of Jesus' ministry ensures the party must go on! Why does John tell this story of a wedding? Why turn water into wine? Perhaps it's a clue that points, right from the beginning of his Gospel, to Jesus' ministry as that of relationship, fidelity, joy and abundance for all.

Now, all the gospels make this point about Jesus' ministry, just in different ways. In comparison, in Luke for example, early on there is a story of Jesus reading from the scroll of Isaiah in the Temple and declaring that he has come to bring freedom for the family of God. Here in John, instead of *reading* about it, we see Jesus in *action*, living what he is all about.

John's gospel also does not include the familiar story of the Last Supper where Jesus offers the small, select group gathered in an upper room a piece of bread and a sip of wine as in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. There is no "sip" of wine for John, but gallons of it right from the get go! John *begins* with this massive statement to identify the intent of Jesus' ministry.

How does this connect for us? In a sense John is announcing that we're married to Christ! Did you ever imagine your faith this way? Did you ever understand that you are so beloved, so desirable that the God of the universe would want to be in a committed relationship with you? In Jesus, God was setting out a new covenant with us where Christ has come as an embodiment of God's love.

For the people living in John's day, it was most important for them to understand this. He wanted them to grasp that God's love was for them and was meant to be lived, like a celebration, like a wedding, where two become one, where everyone is gathered. John wanted to make the point that all of what was to come needed to be understood in this context – just as a couple makes their vows - no matter rain or shine, sickness or health, God was wedding us in

becoming one of us, joining together in a partnership that would redirect our future. With abundant wine, with Jesus among us, there is no need to go elsewhere.

God has made several covenants through time that people of faith have turned to and relied upon. Psalm 36 echoes this relationship. Here, not only is humankind named, but the heavens and clouds, mountains, animals – all taking refuge in God's protection and being fed in God's house. There is ample to drink and feast upon and the psalmist prays that God would continue in this lovingkindness. Psalms and readings like this were read in times of crisis as they envisioned the protection of God's wings, a covering, a shield. Perhaps for us we can imagine this particularly in times when faith seems threatened, when we doubt or our very core of belief seems to have lost its footing.

We can admit that the experience of faith isn't a smooth and easy road. I can't begin to tell you how many people I have sat with who have said something like, "pastor, how could this happen to me; I'm a good person, I come to church, I give..." and other such characteristics. There are times when we feel alone and uncertain, as if God isn't paying attention or around at all.

We can find ourselves in times where we have nowhere to turn, no resources left, as in John's story where the wine has run out. This is very common these days as grief and worry pile up on our shoulders; at every turn when things might be getting better – they don't.

To be clear, it is not our understanding that God is punishing us. You may hear this sometimes when bad things happen. People will say things like, God is "teaching us a lesson." It is not God's judgment when bad things happen or it feels that God is absent. The scriptures assure us, and promise over and over that God is with us and more so, that out of emptiness, out of nothingness, God is the one who renews life. (We call that easter! Martin Luther called every Sunday a mini easter – to remind us on a regular basis of God's intent.)

In this marriage, we partner with God and with one another to live love into the world. The challenge for us is to understand that every small act of kindness, every decision to forgive, every moment we extend grace, we are upholding our part in this covenant with God.

As described in 1 Corinthians we have been given a multitude of gifts that enable us to accomplish this work. And we do so not for our own benefit, but for the benefit of all Creation. Which brings us to our call, as we begin this year, to be mindful as we join with God in care for the environment. We've all heard, with growing concern, the changes to our climate, the effects of our lifestyle and practices on the health of water, mountains, crops, species of every kind, of

melting glaciers and holes in the ozone. We might feel like this is a problem too large for us to handle – we're all out of wine. It's scary and we're not sure what we can make the changes that are needed. But where we don't have the resources or ability, God does.

We begin by listening. In the Wedding at Cana story, the servants, who didn't know what to do when the wine ran out, listened to Mary who said, "do whatever he tells you." And they did. A simple action, they listened to Mary and then to Jesus, filled the jars with water, drew it out and were amazed at the change. Now, I'm not proposing that environmental changes are accomplished so simply, but I am saying that we are not alone in our care for the environment and we are not without resources to do so. We begin by listening to what we have been learning our whole life of faith, and then enacting it. We've learned that all life matters, that the diversity of life is dependent on the diversity of life. We've been taught that we are stewards of creation, partnering with God for its health and thereby our own. We've prayed for mountains and stars, for soils and livestock. Each day we are invited to be intentional in restoring the precious home God has provided.

What might be one change or ten changes you/your family could personally make toward a healthier planet?

What might be one change or ten changes we as a congregation could make toward a healthier planet?

If we begin by listening together as a family of God, we can take steps of faith fueled by our collective energy and gifts to make changes, provide leadership and inspire others. I believe we have it in us to do this work because God has planted seeds of hope and imagination among us.

Thanks be to God! Amen!