

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany
January 17, 2016
Year C, RCL

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Isaiah 62:1-5
1 Corinthians 12:1-11
John 2:1-11

“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.” In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is a favorite story for Episcopalians. We like having a proof text that justifies or at least permits our enjoyment of alcoholic beverages. But I must confess that I don't know exactly what to make of the story. One could infer a number of different things:

Jesus likes parties, or weddings in particular. Maybe even marriage.

Mary states facts instead of asking directly.

Jesus talks back to his mother.

Jesus is not against drinking, and prefers good wine to bad.

But none of this is all that helpful to our spiritual journeys or living our daily lives. Maybe we should go over the story again. Mary is invited to a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Her son and his friends are allowed to come along. It is not clear that the couple even knew Jesus. Perhaps he simply went along because his mother was going. The party is going along nicely inside, and Jesus and his pals are hanging around the back porch where the cisterns are. Then someone sidles up to Mary and says, “I think we're about to run out of wine.” Mary, being wise, recognizes what a social crisis this is. Without even turning her head, she goes out the back to Jesus. She goes with a little anxiety for the relationship between her and her son has always been

a little edgy, and in the future it will bring much pain. Now she simply says, “Son, they just ran out of wine.” Her anxiety is proved right for Jesus’ reply is cold. “Yeah? So what’s that to you or to me?” Mary being wise and self-controlled, refrains from any further exhortation. She lets Jesus alone and whispers to the help, “If Jesus asks you to do anything, just do it.” Then she goes back inside.

But Jesus does respond to the problem. There is no hocus pocus, no waving of hands, or commands to the water to change. The servants top off the cisterns from the well, then draw off water into their beakers and serve the contents, which now is a very nice cabernet. And it is not just that there is some more wine, there is *wine*. There is lots of wine—one hundred fifty gallons of it. After a bit, one of the men weaves across the room the groom and says to the wedding planner, “Hey, pal. I’ve been to a lot of these gigs, and usually they serve a couple of bottles of nice stuff and then they cut back the el cheapo. But you have saved the good stuff for now.”

So what is the point of the story? Why has this story lasted twenty centuries? I suggest that it lasts because it is the story of all of our lives. For every one of us, sooner or later, the wine runs out. If by the wine we mean the joy and excitement and fun and success of life, then sooner or later it runs out. It may run out of our job, or our career, or a relationship. We feel that there is not enough energy, not enough time, not enough money, not enough excitement, not enough love, not enough, not enough. We run out of what we need.

Unless there is an unnoticed guest hanging around the cistern. And if we take that guest at his word, then plain ordinary water can turn into the new wine. The unremarked, unnoticed parts of our lives. The things we took for granted, when we were floating on our own cleverness, or sexiness, or energy. The smaller gifts, the other parts of those whom we love, the less colorful of our gifts, our friends, our hopes. Suddenly those smaller, plainer, quieter, more ordinary

blessings bubble up into a new vintage. And this new wine is much, much better than the first. This is wine that is the fruit of experience, this is wine that has come with a cost, this is the wine of wisdom. This is the better wine. And there is lots of it.

Of course, anything that is ordinary in our lives can be the water we pour into the cisterns. We place our everyday tasks, our relationships, our friends and colleagues, our health, our jobs, our anxieties, our hopes—all of it can go in the jar. And then we draw it out again and they are transformed into callings, challenges, divine blessings, energy, joy, power, and love. A very heady draught indeed.

And what if *we* are the ordinary water that Jesus may transform into precious wine so that others' joy may be increased? How are we poured into the big storage jars, and then ladled out, changed by Jesus for the joy of the world?

Paul speaks in a different way of how God changes us and uses us for the good of others. He speaks of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He says that to each of us “is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” This word manifestation is in Greek φανέρωσις, an epiphany of the Holy Spirit. Paul emphasizes that these gifts differ widely from one person to the next, and yet they are all manifestations of the presence of God. “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.” What is given to each of us is given for the common good. And it is something more than our natural talents or abilities. It is often connected to our natural abilities, and is a kind of expansion or deepening of them, though not always. One who is naturally intelligent may be granted the ability to understand spiritual truths deeply. One who is naturally oriented to helping others will be drawn to extraordinary acts of service, or to deep intercession. One who is skilled in fashioning things

with her hands may be given the ability to make things which speak of the beauty of God. In every case, there are two marks. One is that the gift is different in nature or scope from natural ability. The second is that it benefits the community in which it is exercised. It is not for the benefit of the individual.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose national holiday is tomorrow, was one such person whose natural gifts were anointed by the Holy Spirit for the good of others, indeed for the good of our nation and of the world. His greatest gift was his understanding of the immense of love God has for every human being, and his ability to communicate that love to all whom he met. His success in effecting positive change by the non-violent confrontation of violent power has changed our society forever. At the end of this worship we will sing the African-American national anthem, "Lift every voice and sing," as we remember our African-American brothers and sisters and the struggles they have endured and still do.

This wine that Jesus makes out of the ordinary stuff of our lives and the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit makes out of our natural abilities are not given only for our joy and the joy of those around us. This wine and these gifts are for God's joy as well. One of the great images of heaven in the Bible is that of the wedding feast. The Eucharist is a foreshadowing of that great banquet in heaven. And Isaiah says "and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." God does rejoice over us. God rejoices every time we pour some of our ordinary life into water jars for Jesus to use. God rejoices every time we draw out the wine of our gifts of the Spirit and serve them to each other and to our friends and neighbors. God rejoices when we share in the joy of God's great party. This is how we show forth God's presence. This is how God is manifested among us and through us.

Jesus revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him. That is the point for us this morning. Jesus reveals his glory in the very ordinary events of our lives, and we are to believe in him. When the wine runs out, take another look at the water. When Jesus says serve the water, see what wine it becomes. Jesus is always hanging around our cisterns. Like all good stories, this one has lasted twenty centuries because it is about us and because it is true. And because it is true it will last another twenty centuries.

It's important to have Jesus at the party.