

The Rev. Kristin Krantz
St. James', Mt. Airy
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Epiphany 2C
Isaiah 62:1-5
1 Corinthians 12:1-11
John 2:1-11

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;
take our hands and work through them;
take our hearts and set them on fire.
Amen.**

If Advent is a season of waiting, and Christmas is a season of pure celebration; if Lent is a season of repentance, then Epiphany is a season of doing. The anticipation and climatic celebration of the incarnation now lead us to actively examine the life of Jesus and then to live into the ways in which our own lives incarnate God.

It is no wonder, then, that the stories we hear this season make manifest for us, through word and deed, who Jesus the Christ was, while also offering us the chance to comprehend how God's love is woven into our lives.

Last week we reflected on Jesus' baptism, and how our own baptism shows us who and whose we are. This week we encounter the wedding at Cana and the first of Jesus' miracles – a sign of God's abundance, transformation, timing—all wrapped up in God's love – a miracle that has the power to activate our lives as well.

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The wedding, or symbol of marriage, is not the central theme or sign in this passage – at its center is the abundance of wine that Jesus miraculously creates for those gathered.

The deeper truth of this passage is that weddings and marriage are symbolic **not** of human unions, but of our relationship to God and our spiritual journey.

When we claim this truth we are bid to examine the best aspects of what a marriage can offer – love, fidelity, support, laughter, and so much more.

This is what God wants **with** us and **for** us. And the abundance of Jesus' miracle at the wedding in Cana is a sign for us, that despite our own experiences, both positive, negative, or perhaps none at all, with human marriage – God will always be there to pour out love and forgiveness, joy and abiding presence, into our lives.

Womanist theologian Renita Weems compares our spiritual journeys to marriage in this way:

It hits highs and lows, goes through seasons of ecstasy and ennui, and you find yourself wondering whether it's possible to regain the passion, the conviction, the spiritual momentum you once enjoyed. The message of this second Sunday after the Epiphany is yes. Take those empty stone jars, fill them to the brim with the water of hope, prayer and persistence, and draw from them.

We encounter Christ, she says, not only in mountain top experiences, for: he has been known to show up in miraculous ways on more than one occasion in the simple day-to-day activities of drawing water from

wells, preparing food, tending sheep, and trying to figure out what to do when the wine runs out at a wedding celebration.¹

Like all relationships, the ability to journey **with** the one we are committed to – to the top of the mountain and back down again, and throughout the mundane activities of life – is what determines the depth of the bond. And the deeper our bond, the greater the possibility for transformation in our lives and in the world.

And so we turn to that first miracle of Jesus, turning the water into wine, the true center of this story.

Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

Those ordinary vessels are the signs in this story for us. John does not call what Jesus does in this story a miracle, he calls it a sign – calling forth an understanding of something that points to something beyond itself. And so these jars do – they are signs that point to abundance, transformation, timing—all wrapped in God’s love.

When the wine ran out at the celebration, Mary turned to Jesus to let him know. There’s always one person in a group like that, right? The someone who pays attention, or the one who worries about the details, or the person who sees the world through the lens of compassion and calls those around them to action. Mary was all three of those wrapped up into one and when the wine ran out she turned to her son. *Do something.*

¹ *New Proclamation*, 2000.

Jesus' first response was to not take the bait. He even essentially used the classic child's answer of, "I'll do it later." For by performing a sign, a miracle, Jesus knew he was declaring to all those who witnessed it **whose** he was, that he was indeed the messiah, and for whatever reason he wasn't ready yet.

But Mary knew that later wasn't good enough, the need was now.

Do whatever he tells you.

And with that determined prompt, and what I imagine to be one heck of a mom look, Jesus ordered for the stone jars to be filled with water and for their contents to be taken to the chief steward. When he tasted what was in them, it was fine wine.

The abundance of this sign, over 120 gallons of wine, is just as striking as the transformation that is offered along with it. It shows us that God's grace is given to us in abundance, beyond anything we can ever expect. But it also teaches us about the power of God to transform:

To transform the incomplete into the whole
To transform the weaker into the stronger
To transform the ordinary into the precious
To transform the despised into the beloved
To transform the tasteless into that which gives joy to the heart
To transform what we are into what we can become.²

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² Ken Kesselus, *Sermons that Work*.

Transformation and timing are often linked with justice, and so it we must pay attention in our time to the signs that point us in the direction of just action.

Tomorrow is the day we as a nation have set aside to celebrate the leadership and legacy of Martin Luther King, who said, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: ‘What are you doing for others?’”

Here again is the doing of Epiphany.

We, like Jesus, may hesitate in the moment when we see a need in the world around us. That hesitation is what one scholar has called the ‘scandal of divine reluctance.’³ Because when it came right down to it, Jesus seemed to balk at helping those in need at the wedding feast. There is a tension then, between that hesitation, followed by the extravagant gift.

Perhaps we like Mary have a role to play, nudging God with our observation that *they have no wine*. It is *then* that God will show us again the overflowing stone jars which will pour love into our hearts, making **us** agents of God’s transformation.

When we pay attention and act with compassion, we are able incarnate God’s abundant love.

In the words of Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, “(it) is our belief that the outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross are a sign of the very love of God reaching out to us all.”

³ Carol Lakey Hess.

That comes at the end of Gospel. Today we are at the beginning. But no matter where you start the story the same truth is waiting for you: God's abundant love, offered to all – a sign that we are sent out into the world to share.

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I've been here at St. James' for a little over four months. I'm still doing a lot of listening; we've started some good conversations. And I have the sense that it's time to begin working toward going deeper.

One of the things that drew me to St. James' during the Rector search process was the way in which your profile and the conversations I had showed a sense of a community ready to go deeper – both in the spiritual life, and in service to others.

In the coming months I will begin working to plan with the Vestry and other key ministry leaders, ways in which we can all dream together how we will do this.

It will include some new adult formation offerings, things like the month Spiritual Parenting gatherings which begin/began today, and topical or seasonal forums.

It will include special liturgies and concerts, like the Liturgy of Lament & Remembrance for those who've experienced reproductive loss, and the Arts of the Hill series we will kick off in March with a benefit concert for Mt. Airy Net.

It will be the slow work of taking a look at all the things we do to see which ones still fit who we are, and seeking out new ways of being church and serving the world.

In all of this I invite your prayers, your participation, your imagination, and your **doing**. Together may we be another sign of Jesus in the world.

~ AMEN ~