

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany
Corinthians 12:1-11
John 2:1-11
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We've been at the very beginnings of very different Gospels lately.

I don't know if you remember but a few weeks ago I preached on the beginning of the Gospel of Luke where we heard about two surprising pregnancies: a husband struck dumb and in the process creating space for his elderly wife, Elizabeth to address a crowd and then a young and pregnant virgin Mary hiking up into the hills to visit this same elderly pregnant cousin and thereby garnering the courage *to sing* her song about a world turned upside down. And even before this, Mary saying yes, yes, yes to the angel. Divine revelation and human initiative walking hand in hand in the hill country around Judea, leading to the birth of a new revelation.

Here we are today, at the beginning of a very different gospel, the Gospel of John which I think both Steve and Eric preached on recently: *in the beginning was the Word and the word was with God and the word was God....* This is not a pregnancy narrative but interestingly the mother of Jesus is still present, still is a prime mover at different sort of birth: the symbolic birth of Jesus as the Messiah, a worker of miracles who turns water into wine and offers all of us new life at a wedding in Cana.

There are many reasons that the Gospel of John is often called the spiritual gospel, although I think that is a bit of a misnomer, an example of how we often separate the common and bodily and human from the spiritual, other-worldly and elevated in exactly the sort of destructive division that Christ came to earth to overcome. Nonetheless John's gospel, instead of presenting Jesus's message in the form of relatable parables and stories making something mind-boggling and counter-cultural and supernatural more concrete and accessible to his listeners with parables of seeds and sowers and fig tree growers, John does the reverse: complicating the surface and creating a gospel that is perhaps initially more difficult to enter.

More like a challenging poem than a relatable story perhaps or an Anglican chant rather than a heart thumping praise band anthem.

John's symbolic world suggests that at times we can be misled by feeling overly welcome and at home in the Gospel. Maybe a revelation this important is supposed to be a bit strange and arcane, a world set apart, a bit difficult to enter, no coffee cups allowed. Understanding who Jesus is, John suggests is a process that requires letting go of what is familiar and voyaging into some mystical and contradictory depths.

It starts simply enough.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there.

The first thing I notice is that John never uses Mary's name in this gospel. Mary is now "the mother of Jesus" as if it is her *role*, not her personhood that is important. And I'm stymied. I can't decide whether this is a demotion or an elevation and come to the conclusion that it is both.

The next thing I notice is that this story begins *on the third day*, even though chronologically, 5 days have already passed since Jesus meets John the Baptist by the river. Still the gospeller insists the wedding happens *on the third day*. So John is either very bad at telling time, a feature of mystics perhaps, or he is saying something very purposeful with that number 3, foreshadowing Jesus birth into resurrection life which we know will also happen on the 3rd day. And the mother of Jesus will be present at that heart rending birth too.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there.

But for now, at least the mother of Jesus appears to have more practical concerns. The wine has run out. And so she goes to find Jesus and states the problem. Jesus is brusque. Guarding his boundaries, perhaps. *Woman, what concern is that to you or to me. My hour has not yet come.*

Jesus seems to be setting himself and his followers apart which reminds me of his interaction with the syrophenician woman: *Let the children eat first. It is not good to take the children's food and give it to the dogs.* Jesus is asserting his boundaries, separating himself out for another time, another people, another place, another mission.

And what does the mother of Jesus do?

Is she cowed by being rebuked by the son of God? No. Is she ashamed for asking for something pleasurable like wine? No. Is she ashamed for speaking up about a need in the larger community even though Jesus does not share her concern? No. Does she back down? No. Does she attack him? No. But if you notice she does initiate yet another step forward after their unsatisfactory conversation even without *any assurance* that he will do what she asks. Even though she doesn't know what will happen **she prepares the way for it to be done.** Human initiative and divine revelation walking hand in hand in the hills around Judea and in a banquet hall in Cana. And in stepping forward the mother of Jesus steps beyond her role as a mere passive guest at a wedding, and prepares the way for a miracle. She prepares the way of the lord

Do whatever he tells you she says to the servants, insuring that later, when Jesus shows up and asks them, no doubt rather brusquely, to fill all the empty religious ceremonial jugs w water, instead of being horrified, they comply.

And then (I imagine) having said her piece and taken steps to give her prayer *some real traction in the world*, the mother of Jesus goes back to sit at one of those round wedding banquet tables, her hands patiently folded in her lap, looking a bit like my mother in law from Chicago.

With these empty religious ceremonial jugs, John is signaling that traditional religious life can become dead. What these jugs held, they no longer hold. They have dried up. These ceremonies are no longer bringing people true life, living water, real joy which is what God wants for them. God is signaling that something needs to change. And Jesus can change it. All the time.

We need living water.

We need living water.

We need living water.

Even now.

And what of the guests? These guests, this crowd who are always stand-ins for us? Do the wedding guests recognize that a miracle has occurred? It doesn't seem so. They stay in the background a second glass of wine upheld in their hands. Do any of them notice that it is the best wine they have ever tasted? That it tastes like a January thaw and a cure, summer rain on dry desert skin, a world of understanding and hope? Do they notice that suddenly their fears *for life* and their fears *of death* are allayed and that they feel *lifted up*?

And even today, as we scroll our phones, looking for testing sites or test results or just plain old tests, but caught in some indecipherable 9th circle of COVID hell, looking for some sense of normalcy and security and abundant life, wishing we could be back in church or home in bed, not realizing that wherever we are a miracle has occurred.

There is a feast

We are present

We are alive.

The Gospels, like different preachers, offer us such different gifts! Have you noticed how some people gravitate towards one Gospel or the other? Or how each of us gravitate to different Gospels at different times of life? *What a friend we have in Jesus*, we sing one day while grappling with the mysteries of the Trinity on the other? Have you noticed as Paul so aptly points out in the Letter to the Corinthians that Taylor read this morning that we have *not only* different gifts but different *preferences* and *different ears to hear*? *And different ears at different times*. Differing comfort with the abstract and the concrete, with the academic and the evangelical, with the cognitive and the embodied, with the historical and traditional and the

creative and new...and with how these separate gifts and ways of seeing can merge and flow into one another? How can we embrace these gifts instead of cordoning them off and pitting them against each other? Does it have to be a choice in a church? Diversity *or* unity? Especially here at Holy Trinity where being eclectic seems to be one of our greatest charisms! And where we know we can trust in the power of the Holy Spirit in all her different guises because we have experienced so many of them. We can be confident that these *hybrid gifts* are activated by the same spirit and that spirit doesn't lie.

God does not want our religion to be too holy to be happy in. Or to hew so close to tradition that it dries out like a ceremonial jug. We need to find the living water that is available to us today in this community with all our diverse gifts... Only one of which is the new streaming center that Ty has been working on all week. Divine revelation and human initiative walking hand in hand. God wants us to have living water. Because regardless of the limitations of our current conditions, we were made not only for sorrow and worry but for joy.

So use your initiative and follow Mary up into the hills. Use your initiative and be like the mother of Jesus and ask for what you need. Don't hide your light under a bushel basket but share it with this wonderful community and open your heart, to receive and recognize the gifts of others. The Holy Spirit is larger than either our abilities or our preferences and this is living water.

Here is a poem by Mary Oliver: a poem and a poet simultaneously accessible and deep.

I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers
flow in the right direction, will the earth turn
as it was taught, and if not how shall
I correct it?
Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven,
Can I do better?
Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows
can do it and I am, well,
hopeless.

Is my eyesight fading or am I just imagining it,
am I going to get rheumatism,
lockjaw, dementia?
Finally, I saw that worrying had come to nothing.
And gave it up. And took my old body
and went out into the morning,
and sang.

There is living water available in the very diversity of our gifts.

There is living water available at the Eucharist we can celebrate today, even over zoom.

There is living water waiting for us at a banquet in the world to come.

So let us take our old and COVID-weary bodies out into the world *and sing*.

Amen.