

Epiphany 2C-RCL-2022

January 16, 2022—At the Church of the Advent, Hatboro

By the Rev. Naz Javier, Priest-in-Charge

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

As we draw near to you, O God: may your Word be the wisdom spoken; may your Word be the message heard; may your Word be light to guide us as you also send us into the world. In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. (cf. Deuteronomy 5:27)

1. For a portion of my ordained ministry—given the church tradition where I was—I was an odd wedding guest, for reasons, I suppose that you could imagine. I'd get polite invitations and stay for the hors d'oeuvre, say grace, mingle a little and leave. And for the couples who have I gotten to know in the process, sometimes, I'd stay for the entire event. At best, I think it's awkward for the couple who invited me as it is for me. Hmm... "where do we put the priest?" On one end, I'd get seemingly brilliant arrangement—we'll have him sit with the grandparents' table. Or for those who really knew me, they'd put me in the singles' table, with the thought that the gay priest can have fun with the ladies...they can all be campy together!
2. It's likely obvious why I begin our reflection this morning with those recollections about my being invited to wedding celebrations—in this year's lectionary cycle, we hear the story of the wedding at Cana, likely put there on this second Sunday after the Epiphany because it is dubbed as Jesus' first miracle in his adult ministry. It is the first of his many manifestations that we'll hear in the next seven weeks before Lent.
3. But like many weddings banquets where there are additional attractions and interesting details other than the spouses, the Gospel passage presented to us this morning also presents us with a whole buffet of symbolism—and an explicit instruction about the marriage covenant is not even on offer! Even if you look at our Book of Common Prayer, while the famous introduction to the Rite (the part that begins with "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God...") alludes to the Lord adorning the marriage feast with his presence, notice that the text we heard today is not one of the recommended selections for the Gospel—and the reason for that is this: the passage is truly less about the couple, as it is about the banquet and the guest, Jesus. And from the way the text tells it, it is as if

Jesus and his disciples were more tag-alongs: Jesus' mother was there and as if an after-thought, Jesus and his disciples *had also been invited*. So, we can't even say that the couple intentionally invited him there! Let's just settle, then, that the Lord Jesus was there as a guest.

4. But what happens in the wedding—as it happens in many good wedding banquets—is that there's something somewhat dramatic takes place as well as something surprising: in this case, they run out of wine; and as we know from the end of the story, the water turns into wine, with the exclamation by the chief steward, *"Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now."* Of course, he says this thinking that the couple knew this all along! If you ask a couple, even now, if they recall every detail of what happens during their wedding reception—I suppose, unless guided by the photographs—some might not be able to tell you all the intricate details! But let's not derail ourselves...
5. One of the favors, if you will, that we can take away from this wedding banquet is the teaching that—invited intentionally or not—the presence of the Lord Jesus can bring about surprises even in the midst of the most ordinary of circumstances. One of the commentators on this text tells us that this story is, perhaps, the least useful of Jesus' miracles—at least on the surface. That is, Jesus did not make the lame walk or the blind to see or the sick to regain their physical strength. Instead, Jesus made wine—wine that, for many in that world, symbolized life and the experience of festivity and abundance. I think, at times, when we think of the Lord's presence or intervention, we tend to narrow it down to the more impressive events—those that truly seem miraculous, that is, something we cannot quite explain with science.
6. But then again, if you or someone you know have been in the midst of melancholy or uncertainly caused by the different stressors of ordinary life, or the anxieties and, at times, debilitating fear brought about by tragedy, you will also likely know that the rediscovery of joy—or, even, plainly, encountering pleasure or just light-heartedness—can, in and of itself, feel miraculous. The ability to have a sense of taste or smell after a COVID infection can literally lift-up the spirits of someone who may have lingering physical symptoms of the disease. And that is the miraculous epiphany or manifestation of the Lord Jesus: **that he encounters us in the midst of the**

ordinary and allows us to savor the graceful notes of his bounteous vintage of wine, even when we have drunk ourselves to a stupor!

7. But there is more—did you ever think that you’d leave the banquet with just one goody bag? Jesus’ mother tells the servants, *“Do whatever he tells you.”* John’s gospel can present a truly divine Jesus—the “Lamb of God,” as John the Baptist calls him. But this passage is a timely reminder that Jesus is very much human too—that he has a mother who can pester him; a mother who will appear later on at the foot of the cross. But Mary’s statement to the servants can also apply to us: to do whatever Jesus tells us—and what Jesus tells us today is not so much to fill the barrels with water (the stuff of the potential miracle), but to make the stuff of miracles in a different way—and that different way, I propose to us, today, can be found in the First Lesson, and voiced for us by the prophet Isaiah. In the text, the prophet speaks not to God in prayer, but, in fact, to the people and for the people. And the stuff of miracles is this: **that we not be silent until the city (the figurative Zion)—the people of God—truly experience their new identity as God’s beloved.** It’s not so common nowadays, I suppose, for married people to take on a new name; but in the ancient world it was the norm—and for us to fully appreciate the Isaiah text, we need to put on that lens for a moment: the task of the servants—those who do what Jesus tells them—is to be heralds and disruptors (to be a noisy people) before God, yes; and also to the systems that oppress: that when God meets his people (when God fills them with his new wine), when God injects himself into human experience: the people gain a portion of the divine identity: the *“Forsaken”* and *Desolate* (proper nouns) become *“My Delight is in Her,”* and *“Married.”* Just imagine that it’s like to be given a new grace-filled identity. Those who had an experience of being the object of a schoolyard bully could, perhaps, identify with this transformation—that event when you’re no longer subject to whatever nasty and negative name you were called in the school yard; but, at the very least called by your proper name... that experience can be akin to the festive abundance of 6 thirty-gallon vats of wine... that is what Jesus is asking us to do; that is how Jesus is asking us to live.
8. But then again there’s more... this banquet is just filled with one favor after another! *“Do whatever he tells you,”* can also be embodied by our shifting our appreciation of God’s gifts not as individual treasures to be hoarded or

used as weapons for competition; but instead appreciating them for what they are: gifts for which we are custodians. Like the servants who brought the water that Jesus eventually changed into wine, we do not possess the water for our own selves alone. If anything, we're merely the vessels—and the liquid that we hold (the skills and expertise that we may have)—ought to be brought to Jesus so that they might be activated by the Spirit and used for the good of all. Competition, even in spiritual gifts is not a modern phenomenon—our forebears in faith in the Church of Corinth experienced it; and Paul had to remind them that the gifts they may exhibit personally are not personal possessions but merely vehicles for activation by the Spirit.

9. This weekend, we pause to remember the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. As we hear the many abundant gifts coming from the wedding banquet, I do not think it a far jump for us to also reflect that part of his legacy to the body of believers is tireless witness to ensuring that people be called not by the names the bullies of society have imposed upon them but rather discovering their true, God-given identity: the people over which God rejoices; the people whom God holds as a diadem in the hands of their creator. It was also in his legacy that we rediscover that hate does not overcome hate; but it is light and life—the light and life that flows from the recognition that in the banquet caused by God's visitation in his Son—that in the glory of his son (found in the cross and the resurrection)—everyone (just think about the cast of characters around Calvary, they can be archetypes of all of us) finds redemption, everyone finds abundant love.
10. And so this day, let us worry less about how odd of a guest we might be at the wedding—it's likely a guarantee, much like any truly joyful wedding, there's others as odd if not more odd than you... Instead let us preoccupy ourselves with Mary's reminder to the servants: to do whatever Jesus tells to do!
11. To Christ, who graciously transforms the stuff of our labor—menial and ordinary as it is—to his overflowing wine of abundance, festivity and joy; to him be glory and honor now and forever. AMEN.