



SERMONS THAT WORK

Epiphany 2 (C)

Light

[RCL] Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

*“Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, and your faithfulness to the clouds...
For with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light” (Psalm 36: 5, 9).*

In today’s reading from the Gospel of John, we encounter Jesus at the very beginning of his ministry. Jesus has been recently baptized and recognized as Lamb of God, Messiah, Son of God, and bearer of the Holy Spirit by his cousin John the Baptist, the leader of a popular renewal movement. People have come to the banks of the Jordan from far and wide, to be baptized, cleansed, purified in living water, to counter the corruption and stagnation of the established temple worship in Jerusalem. Jesus may have been a follower of John the Baptist; certainly, he came all the way from Galilee to be baptized by him. Jesus would support John’s message about refreshing worship practice; he frequently found himself at odds with the temple authorities.

But that is jumping ahead. Jesus knows, John the Evangelist knows, and we know what is to come, but the folks on the ground, Jesus’ family, friends, and followers are still at the beginning of the story.

Jesus and his first followers, drawn from among the followers of John, have returned to Galilee, where they are the guests at a wedding. Jesus’ mother clearly is aware of her son’s special gifts, and when the wine runs low, she asks him to do something about it. Jesus responds with the words, “My hour has not yet come.”

The season of Epiphany, in the northern hemisphere, coincides with the season of growing light. After the winter solstice in December, it takes some time to feel the new light, but at last, in January, we begin to notice a new strength, a growing life, in the light. John the Evangelist has proclaimed that Jesus, “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world” (John 1:9). Like the January light of Epiphany, that true light takes time to emerge and grow, to increase in strength.

In the reading from his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of spiritual gifts, gifts of wisdom, healing, working miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits. In the story of the wedding at Cana, we see Jesus growing into his spiritual gifts.

The central claim of the Gospel of John, John’s thesis, so to speak, is that Jesus is Son of God, the source of eternal life. The purpose of John’s book is to help his readers, members of John’s first-century community of Jewish followers of Jesus, to truly believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and the bearer of new and

eternal life for those who follow him. John lays it out, with John the Baptist setting the stage for Jesus, the one who is greater than he. Both Johns proclaim that Jesus is the true light, the Messiah. Then the evidence is presented in the form of signs and miracles. Jesus, of course, knows who he is, and his mission, like John the Evangelist's, is to make others believe, so that they may have eternal life in the Kingdom of God. So, growing into his mission and spiritual gifts, Jesus performs his first sign at the wedding. He transforms water into wine. Good wine. From living water, the water of baptism, Jesus creates new life.

Wine, for the friends and followers of Jesus at the wedding, even before the Last Supper and the Eucharistic table, was a powerful symbol of sustenance and life. Wine carries a message of transformation – grapes transformed by fermentation into wine – a message of re-creation and refreshment, of new life. Today's reading from Isaiah speaks of God's promise of fertility and abundance, using the image of marriage: "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married" (Isaiah 62:4).

The wedding at Cana embodies the image of fertility and new life prophesied in Isaiah, while the miracle of transforming water into wine expands the idea of new life to imagine a life in Christ, a life infused with the Holy Spirit. For Jesus' followers, the miracle at Cana is the first sign on the road to a new way of being, a revelation of the Kingdom of God.

In the Gospel of John, there are three simultaneous audiences for the message of salvation, of new life in Christ. Jesus' audience is his family, friends, and followers. Jesus offers signs that he is the Messiah, the light and savior of the world, so that they may believe and be transformed to new life. John tells the tale to his first-century community, presenting and explaining those same signs, so that they will believe and be transformed, like water into wine. John further addresses his future audience, the contemporary reader in each era to come, leading to us, here and now. John, with Jesus, offers us the evidence that the Kingdom of God awaits us, a new life, a way of being that is hospitable, abundant, generous. A life where each one of us contributes from our abundant gifts, activated by the Holy Spirit.

On this second Sunday after the Epiphany, in the new and growing light of Christ, scripture asks us to trust the signs, to believe that life in Christ is creative and renewal is possible. Transformation, like the growing light of Epiphany, is gradual. May we allow our gifts of the spirit to emerge and grow, as the Spirit chooses, with God's help.

Let us pray: Gracious God, your glory is revealed in the miracles of Jesus. Help us to believe. Help us to trust in our spiritual gifts, given by your Holy Spirit. Help us to remember that transformation is a process, that your call is planted and grows in us, like the growing light of Epiphany. Help us to be steadfast in the certainty of rebirth into eternal life. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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