

**2 Epiphany  
January 20, 2019**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.  
Amen.**

Last night I had a dream where I was talking with friends. As I left I said, "My sermon has some holes in it. I've got to go and stitch it together." I know my unconscious was telling me something, and my sewing skills are not that good, so here goes.

On the Sunday after Christmas we heard the Prologue of John's gospel ... "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God." As I mentioned then, this was a poetic proclamation ... and early hymn to the "logos" ... the essence of life ... and it ... the "logos" ... is equated with Jesus. This "Prologue" is quickly followed by a story of John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism, and then Jesus calling several of his disciples. This is all contained in the first chapter of John's gospel.

The Second Chapter of John begins with the Wedding Feast at Cana. Now, for many Christians one of the "proofs" that Jesus is the Son of God is his ability to perform miracles. In John's Gospel the story that we just heard is Jesus' "First Miracle" ... turning water into wine at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. It is the first of seven "miracles," and for many faithful Christians, these "miracles" are the evidence that Jesus is divine.

However, I would like for us to look at this story through a different lens. For those whose faith is dependent upon these "miracle" stories this isn't an either/or, but rather a both/and approach. I believe that the reason for telling the stories of miracles has a much deeper meaning than just to point to some supernatural power. I believe that when we limit our vision of the divine power of God in Jesus to a set of what some would consider mere parlor tricks, that we diminish ... perhaps even debase ... the greater truth that is being told.

First of all, let's look at the context. This story of Jesus turning water into wine follows immediately upon the grand Prologue of John's Gospel, and then John's account of the Baptism of Jesus. I believe that this account of Jesus turning water into wine is a literary device ... it is giving us a perspective through which to read the rest of the story in John's Gospel.

Imagine being invited to a wedding feast ... a huge, multi-day event ... only to find that the host has run out of wine at the reception. Perhaps the bridegroom was not prepared for so many guests to show up, or he had not planned for the guest to drink that much wine so quickly ... or maybe both. But just as the party is getting into full swing, the wine runs out. Then, one of the guests miraculously produces an abundance of wine, and of absolutely superb quality. Life is

brought back to the celebration ... the party continues unabated ... while a group in the corner marvel at this mysterious guest who turned water into wine.

But what if this story isn't just about a wedding feast in a Galilean village, but about life ... my life and your life? Imagine, if you will, that you have been invited to live life in all its fullness, and that you have journeyed to this place in time and space where you, along with others, are celebrating everything life has to offer. It is as if you are all sharing in a spirit that reduces your defenses and inhibitions, and opens your heart and soul to the world around you.

Then, suddenly, you find out that there is no more spirit to assuage your thirst ... that spirit has run out ... it has dried up. Instead of feeling joyous in the company of others you begin to feel lonely and abandoned ... even isolated. Instead of feeling like you are a part of a community, you feel marginalized. Then, what seems like out of nowhere, something happens, and there is again an abundance of spirit ... a spirit of a quality that far surpasses anything imaginable. A spirit that brings restoration to your life.

That, to me, is the story of the Wedding Feast at Cana. It is not merely about Jesus' ability to perform signs and miracles, but about returning spirit and joy in abundance when people are surprisingly and suddenly thrust into scarcity by loss and suffering.

In our first reading today we heard the prophet Isaiah speaking to the people of Israel upon their return to their homeland after being exiled in Babylon. The Israelites had been attacked by the Assyrians. Their Temple had been destroyed. The brightest and best of the country had been deported to Babylon, where they lived for several generations. They had been told that they were God's chosen people, and then it was as if God's spirit had left them ... that it had dried up ... and they were overthrown by a foreign army and shipped off to an alien land. They had been invited to a party thrown by their God. They had made a covenant and built a temple, and in the middle of the celebration the wine ran out.

While in exile the Israelites lived with abandonment and fear, but their God did not forget them, and miraculously produced new wine and restored them to their homeland. Sixty years after the exile began, the Persian king, Cyrus the Great, restored the Israelites to their homeland. As we heard in the reading the Israelites were promised a new spirit beyond anything they could imagine:

*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 what about that Christian community formed by Paul in Corinth? It was almost as if they feared that the wine would run out before the party really got started. They had been invited to celebrate a new relationship with God through Jesus of Nazareth ... not just with their words, but in the way they lived their life as a community. Yet they were divided, and what divided

them was the hoarding of what spirit had been given them ... as if there was only so much to spread around.

Paul has to remind the people of this community in Corinth that they are living with an abundance of God's Spirit ... that new wine has been poured over them ... and each expression of that Spirit has equal value in the community. Remember, those early Christians were people who were often marginalized and disenfranchised ... people who had thought that the wine was not even available to them. And yet, in the new community gather in the name of Jesus, they had come to celebrate a new spirit far beyond what they could have imagined.

I believe that this is a story that many of us know to be true in our own personal lives. It only takes a few questions to uncover the possibility: When have you accepted the invitation to celebrate your life and fully engaged in the partying ... to live your life to the fullest ... only to feel like the wine just gave out ... that the spirit left you? In what areas of your life have you felt life just slip away, dry up, and leave you parched for some spirit ... any spirit ... to enliven your heart and soul?

I don't think it is an experience that is too foreign to many of us. Whether it is discord in a relationship, or a tragic event, a dreaded disease, or even depression brought on by a confusing world, we feel as if that spirit that we knew within us has disappeared. The loss of a loved one, a life-threatening illness, or just getting older and losing one's independence can feel like a soul-loss. These events can be life changing ... some faster working than others. But what they have in common is the thirst for spirit to reinvigorate our lives.

Two thousand years after Paul's letter to those in Corinth, this community of St. Cyprian's had a similar experience of feeling like the wine had run out, only to find a new and abundant source of God's Spirit being poured upon us. In January of 2007 this community of faith was still reeling from the departure of the group who became Christ the King Anglican Church. That group left the Episcopal Church over the issue of how gays and lesbians were being included in the life and leadership of the Church.

Remember Paul's words:

*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. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

Wisdom , knowledge, faith, healing ... all gifts of the Spirit that are present within this community of St. Cyprian's ... all working for the common good. When it looked as if the wine had run out for this congregation, the abundance of God's love ... known as we take seriously what Jesus took seriously ... has restored this community to a full life in our faith that includes all of God's children.

The story of the Wedding Feast at Cana reminds us that God's Spirit is always present and abundant. Jesus had the servants pour water into the stone jars. This is a significant but often overlooked piece of the story. These weren't just any jars; these are stone jars. These stone jars were used for the rite of purification. When a person was separated from the community for even a minor reason ... when they were marginalized or outcast ... and they want to rejoin the community they would participate in the rite of purification ... it was a cleansing rite of renewal and restoration to the community. The water for the rite of purification was kept in stone jars, and it was to those jars that Jesus turned. Then, without any action or hand waving by Jesus, he had the servants draw from the jars ... and they were filled with wonderful fine wine ... in abundance.

We are those guests at the wedding feast, holy vessels awaiting renewal and restoration. Even in our times of thirst, when we feel parched and without spirit, the opportunity awaits us to be filled ... to be transformed ... to be renewed ... to be restored to ourselves and to the community of which we are a part.

The miracle of the Wedding Feast is not merely turning water into wine. The miracle is that God's Spirit is available in abundance to transform our lives after loss and suffering ... loss and suffering that dries up the spirit. And, God's Spirit is available in abundance to transform and return us to the celebration of life ... renewed and restored as a beloved child of God. It is definitely a miracle story ... turning water into wine ... but it is also about the miracle of the power of God's Spirit to restore us to the fullness of life and the celebration of the community.

Amen.