“Abundance”

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Bethany Presbyterian Church

Epiphany/Baptism of Jesus

Psalm 36:5-10; John 2:1-11

January 19, 2025 – 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

***Psalm 36:5-10***

***Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
    your faithfulness to the clouds.
6Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains;
    your judgments are like the great deep;
    you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.***

***7How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
    All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
8They feast on the abundance of your house,
    and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
9For with you is the fountain of life;
    in your light we see light.***

***10O continue your steadfast love to those who know you
    and your salvation to the upright of heart!***

***John 2:1-11***

***On the third day [after Jesus’ baptism] there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” 4And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come.” 5His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” 6Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. 8He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet.” So they took it. 9When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person called the bridegroom 10and said to him, “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.” 11Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.***

I spent some time with Randy this weekend. He is quite the philosopher really. He and I used to go on long walks and talk when he lived in east Palo Alto, and in San Mateo. He loves thinking. He loves and knows the Bible really well. So naturally, I asked him for some sermon advice when I was with him yesterday. I told him that the scripture was about the wedding at Cana. He proceeded to describe the passage exactly, and knew every detail. Finally, he said, “That’s it.” I asked him what the lesson was. He said, “If you have to explain it, then you’ve already missed it.”

So I guess my sermon is over. Let us pray…..

I told Randy that I might need to say at least a *little* something, and he said, “Do it. I trust you.”

The season of Epiphany focuses on Jesus’ early life and ministry. Last week we talked a little bit about Jesus’ baptism. In the gospel of John, there is nothing that describes that scene directly, but there is a passage in which John the Baptist describes what he saw when Jesus was baptized. Chapter one finishes with a description of the first two days after the baptism where Jesus called a few disciples. The third day after the baptism is when the wedding at Cana happened, where our text for today begins.

This is an early event in the life of Jesus, and the first of his seven signs, or miracles, described in the gospel of John. This is Jesus getting warmed up. It was his mom, Mary who had to nudge him into beginning. I should mention to Randy that maybe the lesson is, “Always listen to your mom!” It was Mary who began it all with her **naming of the truth, of the reality**, “They have no wine.”1 Jesus begged to differ – why does that matter? My hour has not come.

I can just hear it. Mary: They have no wine. Jesus: So? It’s not time for me to do anything about that. Mary: Ah ah ah ah (wagging her finger) Jesus: to the servants “Fill the jars with water.”

Mary initiated the process, and set the stage by telling the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to do. Changing the water into wine was the sign – certainly *the* impossible thing that became possible by no humanly understood means – the definition of a miracle. Let’s also, notice how many smaller miracles actually happened.

It reminds me of the song about the old lady who swallowed the fly. Remember that? There was an old lady who swallowed a fly. I don’t know why she swallowed the fly. There was an old lady who swallowed a spider. She swallowed the spider to catch the fly. I don’t know why she swallowed the fly! Etc.

**Mary** **noticed** the need, **named** it and **set the stage**.

**Jesus** **got others involved** – **the servants** who poured the water and brought some out to the **person in charge** of the banquet; that person, and **then the bridegroom**. The person in charge gave credit to the bridegroom – not for the miracle – he didn’t know about that. But for being so strategic in bringing out the best wine for last, upending a normal tradition. And **the wedding guests** who received the wine, who knew nothing of any change at all.

Mary and Jesus and the servants were the only ones who knew that the water actually became wine. Mary and Jesus knew why/how, but the servants did not. The person in charge of the banquet wouldn’t have noticed. The bridegroom must have been a little confused.

Then there were the disciples. They were already in Jesus’ circle. They probably witnessed everything as it happened and became more deeply committed after they witnessed Jesus’ revelation of God’s glory in himself. “…and his disciples believed in him.”

God’s glory. Just the addition The magnificence, the power and the divine nature of God had just entered the world – beyond King Herod, beyond the shepherds or the wise men, and through this first miracle added to the spreading of God’s larger mission through his son Jesus. This whole season of Epiphany is a celebration of the expansion of and growing sense of awe that was being spread through Jesus’ ministry.

Jesus miracle was a sign of God’s glory not just because of the material change from water to wine, but also because of the abundance of the wine, and the quality of the wine! These signs of abundance and quality have been signs of God’s promises from ancient times.

Here are the things that are in abundance as presented in Psalm 36.

***Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
    your faithfulness to the clouds.
6Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains;
    your judgments are like the great deep;
    you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.***

***7How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
    All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
8They feast on the abundance of your house,
    and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
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    in your light we see light.***

***10O continue your steadfast love to those who know you
    and your salvation to the upright of heart!***

God’s steadfast love – extends to the heavens

God’s faithfulness – extends to the clouds

God’s righteousness – strong and imposing and permanent as the might mountains

God’s saving power – saving humans and animals alike

Commentator Matt Skinner describes abundance as this: “Abundance also means quality,” the best wine, lots of it; “and surprise, wonder, mystery,” how did that happen, what just happened? Just imagine being the servants pouring ordinary water and drawing out actual wine.

Just imagine being the bridegroom – I saved the best for last? What’s he talking about.

Just imagine being the disciples – Did you see what I just saw?

Today is a day to celebrate the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and celebrate his work for the struggle for justice and achievements of those like him who consistently show up and do the work of improving their world. A new year is a great time to look to King for inspiration. And there are others. While I was with Randy yesterday, Tamra played a recording of “Abraham, Martin and John” the song that Prayz will sing for our offertory today. I learned as they talked about the song, that it was written in response to the assassination of Bobby Kennedy, and each verse remembered a civil rights icon that had been assassinated. Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, and John Kennedy, and later an added verse for the assassination of Bobby Kennedy that prompted the writing of the song in the first place.

These are people we celebrate today, also right on the cusp of a Presidential Inauguration. This major every-four-year-event for our country always brings with it a sense of anticipation for any side of any argument. That anticipation will be something that will bring some to say “finally!” and others to say “oh no!” As individuals you and I will find ways to participate in the reality of the world in a way that we can best be effective.

Suleika Jaouad, author of “Between Two Kingdoms” wrote about her journey to healing after her cancer went into remission. Cancer remission didn’t mean full healing. The difficult re-entry into the world after remission turned out to be a bigger battle. Her book, a perfect example of telling *from* your story instead of *about* your story, was just one way she has become an advocate. She said in a TED talk that she met a young girl experiencing the protocols of cancer treatment. From that girl, Suleika said, she learned that “It is far more radical and dangerous to have hope, than to live hemmed in by fear.”

It's easy to be hopeful when the burden of day to day living is not compromised. But when fear arrives and we are faced with great uncertainty, even the smallest questions and decisions become traumatic. Creative solutions seem out of reach. Matt Skinner says, for the disciples and for us in our lives, “the way forward is hard, uncertain, and a lot of work.”

I invite us to remember the generosity and abundance of God’s love and righteousness, and remember what scripture constantly reminds us – that God’s love is for all, that God is always doing new and unexpected things, that like the miracles of Jesus, God’s glory is abundant, rich and full of surprises.

Let us pray with confidence….

1All of the ideas about the importance of this work of Mary, is from this article that I *highly* recommend! Debi Thomas, “They Have No Wine,” 1/13/2019, Journey with Jesus, <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2053-they-have-no-wine>

2 Matt Skinner “Preacher to Preacher” Facebook reel

3<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5HQamrXlSY> (14:38) **What almost dying taught me about living | Suleika Jaouad**