

## 2022 C Epiphany 2

In the name of the Holy One: Amen.

This is the second Sunday after the Epiphany. In the season of Epiphany, between the solemn seasons of Advent and Lent, the church pays attention to the parts of the salvation story that show the opening up of God's presence among us, in everyday life, right here, right now. From now until March, we'll highlight big, mysterious events in Jesus' life, like the arrival of sages, Jesus' Baptism, and his appearance with Moses and Elijah, those two great symbols of Hebrew tradition. In the season of Epiphany the church also looks at Jesus's Teachings, miracles, and encounters with people. And so here we are, on the second Sunday after the Epiphany, hearing about Jesus' first miracle, at a wedding in Cana, a town in Galilee.

What was it like on that wedding day? The courtyard at the house in the town of Cana was packed with guests. They would be celebrating for days, feasting, dancing, telling stories and jokes, making and reaffirming social bonds. Generations and branches of the family would mix. The whole community celebrates. Everyone would feast. Kids would doze on mats or on relatives' laps. This was a special, joyful time, this season of God's glory becoming manifest in everyday life. A good season for a wedding.

The days were also ordinary days, accountable to the daily flow of prayers. Prayer was knit into everyday life—prayer in the morning, midday, evening, and bedtime, in addition to prayer for all kinds of daily things—before and after meals, while dressing, washing up, going about the day's activities. Prayer was the fabric of everyday life because prayer is God's breath, breathing in us.

Prayer was not limited to talking to or about the Holy One; prayer involved bodily actions and tangible materials like water, because God reaches out to us through the material world. How we treat our bodies, and all that God created, is an opportunity for prayer, an opportunity to acknowledge the Holy One, living and real.

Galilee is dusty. Washing the face, hands and feet refreshed the person, sloughed off the old, and honored the ongoing creation of each person's body. And so, off to the side in the courtyard at that wedding feast, there were waist-high stone jars to hold the water for prayer preparation.

At this point in the story, we see God playing a little joke, perhaps in the spirit of the wedding festivities. The humble, everyday water gets turned into wine- and good wine at that! And not only good wine, but served at the very moment when everyone thought the best had already been served!

At this point I feel a temptation to overlook the water in the jugs. I want to rush toward the big reveal, the punchline. It would make a good scene in a movie. Someone makes an offhand comment about refreshments running out, Jesus says something puzzling, his mother shrugs, and before you know it, the steward is laughing and shouting that the best fare has been saved for last. But instead of rushing to the end of the scene, let's pause and

think about that water, just sitting there in the giant jars. Why are water jugs part of the story? What was it like the moment before it was recognized as the highlight of the feast?

It was just plain water, ready to be used for a holy purpose, ready to become something new, something important to the celebration of people coming together. Can we be like that water, ready, available to be part of the life of the community? What if water is a spiritual gift?

Now concerning spiritual gifts, dear siblings, I do not want you to be uninformed.

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 person is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Friends, we rarely know what our gifts are until we bring them into each other's presence and offer them to the common good. You may have an inkling of what your gifts are, and that's wonderful. But you will know much more about the unique gift God has given you, once you make it available for the common good.

Spiritual gifts aren't just something that special people have. They are absolutely not confined to people who are super-religious looking. Spiritual gifts are everywhere. We know this because the Spirit is our breath, the Spirit is our life together.

When the Dalai Lama, leader of the Tibetan people, came to the United States in the 1980's, he gave talks to American Buddhists about lovingkindness and compassion, which are central to Buddhist teaching. During a question and answer session, a student asked him how to heal lack of self-love. The Dalai Lama, who at that time was new to hearing English spoken, was puzzled by the question. He asked the student to repeat herself, then conferred with his translators. He could not grasp the idea that a person might love herself less than she loved others. Finally, when he was convinced he understood the question, he asked the audience if anyone else felt that way. Many hands went up. He was flabbergasted, and sad. He responded passionately, "You are less worthy of love than another person? That cannot be. You are wrong." Many who were there found his words healing.

It's the same with spiritual gifts. Do you think you have no spiritual gift? With all the love in my heart, I assure you, you are wrong. The breath we breathe is sacred. It is itself a spiritual gift. The fact that you are here is a spiritual gift.

Paul lists a few of the gifts that are given to different people, to be shared for the common good. "To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses."

We could add to Paul's list of spiritual gifts. But this community– the human community, the community of the created world, the community of St Mary's– relies upon the utterance of wisdom and knowledge, the faith, the ability to heal division, the ability to see clearly and speak truth to power– these gifts and more are among us. They are given to you and to me and to each person so they can be deployed for the common good.

Back in Cana, in the Gospel story, people are still celebrating, still gathering as a community. We're here to celebrate with them, even across thousands of years. And we're here to celebrate this community. We may feel disconnected because of the pandemic. But each and every person matters. What spiritual gifts are stored in you, just waiting to be activated?

Spiritual gifts come to fruition when they are called out to the common good. God can turn a jug of water into a reason for joy. God gives each person something that is needed for the common good. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, everyone can be great because everyone can serve. You are needed in the community and in the church. You matter in this place.

Amen.