

## EPIPHANY TWO, YEAR C, JANUARY 16, 2022

There is something in our human nature that loves a miracle. Remember how we were captivated by the 'Miracle on the Hudson'. The skill of the pilot and all the heroic efforts of the rescuers and survivors made it a true miracle in our eyes. There have been other miracles that we savor when people are found alive days after a catastrophic event.

In today's gospel Jesus' changing water into wine is considered his 'first' miracle. Well, it may be his first miracle, but other than chronological uniqueness, it doesn't seem to be particularly remarkable. Don't get me wrong changing water into wine is noteworthy. However, it seems that this miracle as his first public display of God-given powers is a bit of an odd choice. How does this miracle really help anyone? True it saves the host of a wedding reception a bit of embarrassment from running out of wine. But no one is healed, no one's leprosy vanishes; no one's sight is restored; no raging storms are calmed. Jesus simply changes water into wine, enabling a party to continue on for more hours, and boosting the host's status in the eyes of the guests who are impressed with the new wine's quality. It's kind of a strange way to make his mark in the world of miracles. It certainly doesn't seem to rank with the miracle on the Hudson or some of the miraculous recoveries we hear about.

So, as far as miracles go, what's so special about this event? Why is this the first? Why bother to include it in the stories of Jesus, when there are so many other things we wish we could know about the life of Jesus? As usual, there's something more than meets the eye regarding this miracle. In fact, John does not call it a miracle. He calls it a sign. For John the real reason that he told this story in the first place is to point to something more specific as that is what a sign is for – to point us in a new or different direction.

This sign is pointing to the meaning of Jesus' life to all of humanity. Jesus came to redefine and bring a new quality to life as we know it. The water he used was in jars for Jewish purification rites which made one holy as a thanksgiving before God. Jesus took this ritual from the past and transformed it into wine symbolizing the life he was offering was like not just new wine but the best of the best. Jesus is presenting us with this unbelievable extraordinary wine that is all about God's abundance and new life. He is offering us something new and invigorating. Too often we fill ourselves up with things we desire, things we think will bring us meaning. But Jesus offers to fill us up with things that are more substantial such as grace, love, hope, joy, forgiveness and generosity in abundance. So, we can choose the watered-down life of our own design, or the abundant life that Jesus offers.

But too often we want to skirt the issues that the abundant life Jesus confronts us with by watering them down. We have a tendency to turn Jesus into a nice man with great ideals but not much realism about how to get along in the world. When he warns us about money and the need to give extravagantly, we think he's exaggerating. When he tells us to turn the other cheek, we're convinced he never had a good look at the size of

our opponent. When he asks us not to judge others, we can't help but point out anyway a few who don't meet God's standards, and when he talks about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick, we're finally sure he's speaking metaphorically and not literally. We have to ask ourselves are we ready for the good wine Jesus offers? Do we really want to be filled to the brim with such potent stuff? Isn't the watered down version actually a little easier to swallow?

This weekend, we celebrate the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. It is also the anniversary of the death of Rabbi Abraham Heschel, one of the finest theologians and thinkers of the post-war era. Both men embraced the idea of new community in their lifetimes. Martin Luther King struggled valiantly for justice and freedom for African Americans, and Heschel spent his entire life attempting to give hope and insight to an entire generation of Jews who had lost all sense of faith through the devastation of the Holocaust. These two men represent the total giving of one's life to the building up of the community by desiring to heal the divisions in the community.

Martin Luther King's vision was one of the Beloved Community. He challenged this nation to go beyond our limited sight, to work toward the day when the Beloved Community was not merely a concept but a reality on earth. In this vision of community, Dr. King said, "Our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation." His vision for community was where love and justice prevail and rule over people and societies. When he spoke of love, he was quick to remind us that it was not sentimental love he was speaking about, but that force which all the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life. King said that "love is the key that unlocks the door which leads to the new reality."

Rabbi Heschel warned us when he said, "Racism is man's gravest threat to man - the maximum of hatred for a minimum of reason". He also said, the task of a human being is to represent the Divine, to be a reminder of the presence of God." This is how the beloved community is built.

Today we know the communities we live in are divided by violence, mistrust, and isolation. Greed and narrow self-interest have become the ultimate values, as materialism, consumerism, and hoarding create a wider and wider gap between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots.

King spoke frequently of the radical "inner spiritual transformation" that would give us strength to fight injustice and lead us to the new age of personal and social transformation. The power we know in our lives, which moves us from a life based on scarcity and fear to a life grounded in abundance and love, is the power so present in the story of the wedding at Cana. The power at the wedding at Cana was Jesus showing us that we too can take whatever is in front of us or inside of us and make it abundant for others to share in. What we give out of our abundance is the power of love in action.

The Christian faith is not about the following of rules as if it was a drug prescription that has very specific guidelines or it won't be effective. The Christian faith is about joy

and abundance and sharing in that with all of our being. Like a copious amount of wine the Christian faith needs to invade all of our being so it can change us completely.

We are called to follow Christ, and that means we are called to the kind of extravagant generosity that boggles the imagination. We are called to commit outrageous acts of kindness, inspired by the inconceivable grace of our God. This is what this story is turning over to us. May this sign and more resound so greatly in our senses that all we are left with is the desire to be infused with joy, with hope, with forgiveness, and abundance that the promise of God's life changing grace gives us. Amen.