

## Epiphany 2, Year C

- Shame that the weather forced us to cancel services last week
- Missed one of my favorite holy days of the year: Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord
- It's one of the suggested feasts for Baptism – day when our youngest, Ezra, was baptized – and it's a day when we have a chance to renew our baptismal vows and re-examine what it means to live as people made new in the waters of the font
- And it was a shame to miss that day, especially since I was ready to give a real barn-burner of a sermon, too
- About how in his Baptism, Christ wasn't cleansing himself with water, wasn't making himself holy – he was that already – but was instead making all water holy through him
- And so, since our bodies are around 60% water, the hard work of sanctification is already over half done
- I believe that to be true, but if you want to hear more about it, you'll have to wait until at least next year, unfortunately
- But there's a theme in that sermon I was planning to give that I think carries over into our readings this week, as well, and that theme is this: sometimes our life in the faith is easier than we imagine it to be – this is true for me, at least
- Sometimes when I recite the Eucharistic Prayer, that beginning part of it that talks about all of the things that God has done for us – creation, covenant, prophets, redemption in Christ – when I think about that, I think it requires some grand response on my part
- It's easy for me to imagine it's simply not enough to live my life faithfully, to really work at loving my neighbor and all that that means – but that I have to go out and perform miraculous deeds in Christ's name, that I have to do something incredible to show God and show the world how much I appreciate all that I've been given
- But, anytime I examine this thought, really sort of think it through in light of Scripture, I'm forced to come to the conclusion that that's not the case
- God's work on our behalf, God's providence and love and mercy, it does certainly necessitate a reaction on our part – but I'm just continually confronted with the fact that it's probably a lot easier than I think
- All of our readings point in that direction, I think – first have ch. 62 of Isaiah, where Isaiah says “For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest.”
- For Christians, Isaiah is something like the prophet of prophets, and what he says in this

reading is that his response to God's grace is to nothing more than to refuse to shut up about it

- All he feels that he has to do is talk, to tell the story, and God will do the rest
- Or consider the Psalm – that famous part of Psalm 36: “Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, and your faithfulness to the clouds.”
- The Psalm itself was written by someone who recognized the staggering generosity God shows to humanity: “How priceless is your love, O God! your people take refuge under the shadow of your wings. They feast upon the abundance of your house; you give them drink from the river of your delights.”
- And what is the Psalmist's response? If they had any reaction at all other than writing a song – and sure, a song that would come to be used in worship for centuries to come – but nevertheless, just a song – then we don't really know of it
- And then in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians – we hear from Paul, that great paragon of the faith, without whom the church as we know it probably wouldn't exist – and what does he say about life in the faith?:
- “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.”
- In other words – everyone should do what they can with what they have – the Spirit empowers us all to make use of our gifts – not to do everything, though he does say that some are given the power to work miracles – but to do what they feel empowered to do by virtue of the gifts they've been given
- And then, finally, we have our Gospel passage today, that third miracle of the Epiphany – Jesus's first miracle, where at a wedding feast in Cana the wine runs out – and his mother Mary asks Jesus to intervene, to do something
- As an aside, alcoholism runs in my family, and this story, especially given its place as the first miracle that Jesus performs, has often caused me to wonder: why would Jesus care if the wedding guests are able to imbibe?
- That's true for us as the Episcopal Church, too: alcoholism runs in our family – so you're allowed to wonder, too: why does it matter?
- It's important to know that wine was, at the time, something of both a staple and a luxury – it was everywhere, and more or less everyone drank, though it was much rarer to drink to excess at the time – but more than anything, wine was a sign of God's providence

- In antiquity, when people were much more connected to the agricultural sources of things, wine was the symbol of a good harvest, a symbol of plenty, a symbol of God's providence, God's abundance
- Wine was a symbol showing that God had given enough in the harvest that some could be used for something that wasn't absolutely necessary but that people enjoyed from time to time
- So when, at a wedding the wine ran out, it wasn't the end of the world – the people would still be married, they might even look back on it someday and laugh – but in the moment, it didn't seem hospitable, didn't seem celebratory, didn't seem as though they would be able to recognize God's abundant love – almost as though, as one commentator puts it, without wine, they were without God's blessing
- Now, chemically speaking, wine is about 85% water – so in the grand scheme of things, Jesus changing water to wine was in some ways a very small thing – as miracles go, it's impressive to witness but not like feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish – not like enabling a man who was paralyzed to walk – certainly nothing like creating the world from nothing or conquering death itself to come back from the grave and destroy death's hold on humanity forever
- No, nothing like any of those – just a simple thing, really, of altering that last 15% – and not for any earth-shattering purpose – just so that the people present would know that God's blessing, God's abundance is all around them – all the time
- We want to make it harder than that, don't we? Want to make our lives some unforgettable witness, some living monument to the grandeur of God
- Sometimes our witness can be so much simpler, though – like the witness of Evoni Williams, a waitress at a Waffle House in Texas who had an elderly customer ask her if she'd be willing to cut his ham for him as he couldn't manage it himself – and she did, without a second thought
- Or like Daniel McNeely, a neurosurgeon in Nova Scotia who had a pediatric patient nervous about an operation who brought a well-loved teddy bear along – but before surgery, asked Dr. McNeely if he'd mind doing surgery on the bear, to reattach an arm that was falling off, which the good doctor happily did, showing how easy it was for the bear to put on the mask and undergo the surgery
- Or like Dave Cochran, a man who lives out of his car in Kansas City, who last weekend helped pull out the cars of some people who had gotten stuck in the snow and ice on the

highway, without even realizing that one of the vehicles he freed was Jeff Allen, an offensive lineman for the Chiefs, who was in a bit of a hurry to get to the Chiefs divisional playoff game against the Colts

- Those three may not have changed the world – they may not, in that one moment, have left some unforgettable legacy – they weren't even thinking about that- but I'll tell you one thing for sure: in those moments, people saw the love of God through them – and for the people they encountered, that may have meant more than they imagined – in that moment, may have meant everything
- So over the coming days and weeks, if you ever find yourself wondering how to truly follow Christ, don't think you have to overcomplicate it
- Tell the story – sing out God's praises – do what you can with what you have – even if it's just a small thing, even if it's something you don't think is likely to make a huge difference
- Love God – and in loving God, recognize that the heavy lifting of changing the world has already been done
- Love our neighbor – and in loving our neighbor, seek to share the Good News of God's great love for us, God's great abundance which surrounds us
- It can be just that simple