

Second Sunday After Epiphany, Year C

January 17, 2010

Isaiah 62: 1-5, Palm 36: 5-10, 1 Corinthians 12: 1-11, John 2: 1-11

Isaiah 62:1-5

{1} For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. *{2}* The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. *{3}* You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. *{4}* 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 your land shall be married. *{5}* For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

Psalm 36:5-10

{5} Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. *{6}* Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O LORD. *{7}* How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. *{8}* They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. *{9}* For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. *{10}* O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart!

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

{1} Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. *{2}* You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. *{3}* Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. *{4}* Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; *{5}* and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; *{6}* and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. *{7}* To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. *{8}* To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, *{9}* to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, *{10}* 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. *{11}* All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

John 2:1-11

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

Back when I was an intern I remember trying to use a common illustration during a sermon. In that case, it happened to be about something that occurred at a pizza place called "Mama Sabarros", which was directly across the street from the church and to which I was certainly no stranger. Anyway, as I greeted folks on the way out

from that worship service it was pretty clear to me that most, if not all, seemed to hear and remember “Mama Sabarro’s” and not the actual point I was trying to make. Oh well!

The reason I mention that story is because it is entirely possible that the author of St. John’s Gospel was using the wedding only as an illustration of a much deeper point and no more than that. The point could be something like: in Jesus, God, faithful to the promises of old, has shown up. Pay attention. Good things are going to happen (or something along those lines). So, the author of St. John’s Gospel would be amused, and perhaps frustrated, that we sometimes focus on things originally regarded only as secondary at best in this wonderful story.

Yet, I simply can’t get past that whole wedding thing. Maybe it’s my Irish background. Weddings, aided by lots of “liquid cheer”, were always, to say the least, intense and “interesting”. By the way, that also applied to birthdays, funerals, holidays, Tuesdays, etc. It could also be because of the more stoic and staid temperament from some on my mother’s side of the family (not exactly “party animals”). Either way, I seem to come to my reticence about weddings honestly.

Why a wedding? Why such a time and place for Jesus’ “first sign” and where He revealed his glory? Don’t you know, Jesus, what happens at weddings?

After mulling over those kinds of questions for a bit, it eventually dawned upon me: “Why not?” While weddings may not be my “scene”, I’m glad they are God’s. In Jesus, God is up to something new. God is not confined by my, or anyone else’s, ideas about who, what, and where are “proper” for God. I’m glad (though not always happy) that God gets to call the shots and not me. I’m glad that God keeps me guessing. I’m glad that God does not pay attention to my often-rigid categories.

From the cheesy music, the “chicken dance”, the “electric slide”, the wardrobe critiques (my favorite wedding activity), and the awkward family “moments”, weddings certainly are, and probably always have been, a real “slice of life”. At weddings, who and what we are as human beings is on display in all its glory. So, I’m glad God decides to “show up” there. We can and should rejoice over and be comfortable in our own “skin” because, in Jesus, God does and is.

Lutherans have always been hesitant to define exactly how Jesus is present during the celebration of Holy Communion. The best we can say is that, according to His promise, Jesus is present “in, with, and under” the very

ordinary elements of bread and wine. Today's Gospel story, and all of today's readings, really, remind us that God is also present "in, with, and under" all of the seemingly ordinary parts of life.

If, in using such a story and these circumstances, the author of St. John's Gospel was trying to get our attention, then he (or she) certainly succeeded with me. What's next? Who is this Jesus guy? Where will He turn up next? What might He do? Of course, those are good questions to be asking every day, not just about the Bible stories. Maybe that's the point.

Finally, a few years ago I remember finding out that the actual location of the town of Emmaus, mentioned in chapter 24 of St. Luke's Gospel, is difficult to pin down. As you recall, Jesus had been crucified and two of His disciples were "high tailing" it out of Jerusalem, sharing their shattered hopes, dreams, confusion, and disappointment as they traveled along the way to Emmaus. At some point, they were joined by a stranger who helped clear things up a bit and who, lo and behold, turned out to be none other than Jesus himself. One preacher, whose comments I consulted, used the fact about Emmaus' elusive location to say that, perhaps then, the road to Emmaus can be anywhere and everywhere. I like that.

Well, as it turns out, the exact location of "Cana in Galilee" is also difficult to pin down. In fact, there are at least three contenders for the honor, all of which apparently have their own versions of the "genuine" stone jars. Maybe that's not such a bad thing.

Cana is about unexpected blessings at unexpected places and times. It's about God's surprising abundance when it appears that our own resources have come to an end. It's about God's delight in the things that delight us. Most importantly, it's about God's quiet, almost hidden, transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Perhaps Cana is, and always needs to be, anywhere and everywhere for those whose hearts and minds are open and, especially, for those whose aren't.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.