

The Second Sunday after Epiphany
The Rev. Christy Dorn

1/14/07

Isaiah 62: 1-5

Psalm 36: 5-10

1 Corinthians 12: 1-11

John 2: 1-11

The Truth about Miracles

Have you ever prayed for a miracle? I'm not talking about a really big miracle—like praying for a family member near death. I'm talking about little miracles....

~ Oh God, please let me pass this test!

~ God, please let our team win!

~ God, please find me a parking spot! I'm from San Francisco and I can tell you that this last prayer is a constant prayer by just about anybody who drives anywhere in San Francisco.

I remember shortly after getting my first car—a brand new Fiat Spider. I was 19 years old--The car had a standard transmission. I hadn't yet mastered the clutch and I drove it straight into the side of our garage. When it happened, I closed my eyes and prayed: "Dear God, I pray this didn't happen." I opened my eyes—it did.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever asked God to move heaven and earth over something trivial, something impossible, something contrary to the laws of nature? I suspect that at one time or another, we've all asked God to undo the past or change the weather patterns—just for our convenience. What's the truth about miracles, anyway? Maybe today's gospel will help us answer that question.

For St. John, the author of this gospel, miracles were not just miracles, but signs of something deeper. For John, this story is filled with poetic meaning.

Jesus is making his first public appearance after his baptism. It's at a wedding. Weddings are holy acts, involving a holy covenant. There are also times of great joy and celebration. But there's a problem at this particular wedding. They're running out of wine. For the Jews, wine represented life and abundance. It was a central part of any celebration—especially a wedding. No wine meant no party. So Mary asks Jesus to intervene. And he does. His miracle of turning gallons of water into an abundance of wine. 180 gallons. Wine that was better than the first. What could Jesus mean by such an extravagant act? This is his first miracle. It's quite different from all his other miracles. Other miracles were about people with desperate human needs for healing, food, safety, life.

The story of Cana begins to tell us who Jesus is and what God invites us to do. The story of Cana is not so much about miracles as we think of miracles, as it is about

newness: new wine, new grace, new beginnings. Jesus provided an abundance of wine at the wedding feast—to announce the joy of God’s new realm—to inaugurate this new realm. He created new wine in the very vessels once used to hold the water for Jewish purification rites. The very jars that were there to hold the water to assure that people’s unclean hands were cleaned, to assure that that which was defiled and impure and detestable and profaned was made pure by washing properly. He performed this miracle to bring the new wine of grace in place of the restrictions of the law. These same jars began to fill up and brim over with rich red wine declaring to us that all of us are made whole and holy. The one who begins his ministry with this kind of miracle is giving us a bold clue as to what his God is like and what God’s new realm is about. This isn’t a God who cautiously measures who will be loved and who will be unloved among us; who will be blessed and who will be cursed into fullness among us; this is a god who delights in lavishing goodness and joy and compassion upon the hungriest and the thirstiest and dirtiest among us. The extravagance of Christ is the heart of the miracle.

Jesus can and does change things. In the final verse in today’s gospel, this revelation is realized with the words, “his disciples believe in him.” And that’s what God invites us to do: to trust God and to respond in faith.

Tomorrow we commemorate the birthday of MLK, Jr. Dr. King never moaned about the fact that the wine of freedom was drying up in America. He believed deeply in the power of God’s grace not only to change water into wine, but to change hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. How do we--as individuals, as a church, as a nation—change and believe in the new wine that Jesus still pours out for us?

~ Where in your life--where in our community--is there scarcity that needs God’s abundance?

~ Where is there emptiness that needs Christ’s fullness?

~ In Huntington Beach and Orange County where are there empty plates, empty pockets, empty lives that need the extravagance of Christ’s gift to transform them ~What is stagnant or stuck and desperately in need of newness?

~ What is our part in all of that?

Jesus is the giver of extravagant gifts: He came that we may have life—and have it abundantly (John. 10:10). We’re invited to enter into the joyful celebration made possible by Jesus’ gift, and through this gift, catch a glimpse of God’s identity and of God. That’s the truth about miracles. Thanks be to God.