

Isaiah 62:1-5; John 2:1-11; Epiphany 2C, 1/16/21
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“It will not be possible to make me shut up. I will not stop talking, proclaiming, or preaching.... I will not pause. I will not rest, for the sake of the precious city God loved and left, and I will keep this up until every nation and king can see that Jerusalem has been declared innocent and lifted up to a place of glory and honor.” (Working Preacher, Anatheia Portier-Young)

It will not be possible to make me shut up! These are the prophet Isaiah’s words as he **boldly** acts as intercessor for Jerusalem. Following the exile, when the Jewish people returned to their land, it was decimated, and it seemed to them like a desert. The restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem met countless obstacles and delays. The Jewish people had been full of hope but, upon return to their homeland, they were battling deteriorating morale caused by broken dreams and crumbling faith. They felt God had turned away in indifference.

So, Isaiah laments and boldly protests, interceding on the people’s behalf, and he **holds God accountable**. The notion of “holding God accountable” probably tends to make many of **us** squeamish, but the prophets frequently did this. Upon the Jewish people’s return to Jerusalem following the horrific experience of exile, they faced despair. It is in that place of despair, when they deeply feel

utterly **depleted**, a place where they feel the **absence** of God, that the prophet speaks. Isaiah **names** their despair and **holds God accountable**. Then, the prophet promises newness, transformation and even new names signaling joyful union for Jerusalem and all the land around her. There **will** be change and transformation and abundant life will return!

In today's gospel reading, John gives us a story that starts with a recognition of need, of emptiness, of **depletion**. Jesus and the disciples are attending a wedding. As the scene unfolds, in-laws are getting to know each other, old friends and relatives are seeing each other and reminiscing, and the bride and groom are interacting with their guests. In my mind as I picture this scene, I **always** imagine people dancing and shouting out, much like Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, when he sings "L'chai-im! To life!" Anyway, on the **third day** of the festivities, over in the corner of the room a nervous silence sets in. There is the alarming discovery that the wine has run out, it has been **depleted!** Wine, the sign of God's abundance and a vital component of any wedding in that day, has run out and the party is far from over!! There are still four days of partying left to go!! We can

imagine the tension in the air. For the groom's family, this is not just an embarrassing situation, this is a major social faux pas.

So, Jesus' mother sizes up the situation and swings into action. And, like the prophet Isaiah, **Mary will not remain silent**. She tells her son about it. The implicit command is: "Fix it!" Mary is a prophet who will **not** take **no** for an answer. In fact, knowing her son can handle the situation, she says to the servants, "Do whatever my son tells you." Mary speaks and acts as intercessor for the wedding party and **all** the guests. In Mary's persistence, as she **observes** the difficulty, **names** it, and **takes action** to help, she provides the leadership for the miraculous sign that takes place. When Mary tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says, Jesus then performs one of the most understated, yet mighty acts in John's gospel.

There were six large jars for water to be used in washing according to various Jewish purification rites. Each jar could hold 20-30 gallons of water. Jesus tells the servants to **fill** them to the brim and then he tells them to draw some out and take it to the man in charge of the feast. When the steward tastes what had been water, it is wine, and it turns out to be the **best** wine at the party! Not only is it the best, but there is an **abundance** of wine, more than the guests

could possibly consume. Jesus provides what would amount to an additional **thousand bottles of wine!** The steward is so impressed with the wine that he pulls the groom aside and says, “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.”

In Jesus, Immanuel, God made flesh, there is **abundance**. On the **third day**, a reference by the way to the resurrection, Jesus provides **abundance**. **Jesus is the new wine!** In this first miracle in the gospel of John, Jesus provides more **wine, joy, and blessings** than the people could possibly have imagined or deserved. It is truly a story about God’s overwhelming, gracious abundance.

As we gather today for worship, I am very aware of the deep need and despair present in our world. We are facing so many challenges. With Covid exploding around us, and the plethora of issues our country currently faces, we **need** a tangible miracle of God’s abundance. In light of today’s gospel reading, we cannot help but come face to face with the creative word of a living God and **we do not take no as an answer!** Today’s reading invites **us** to trust so much in God’s generosity and abundance that we, like the prophets of old and like Jesus’ mother, nudge God with our observation and

our protest: **they have no wine!** Like Mary, in the face of insurmountable need by so many people around this world, **we too** cry out and lift **our** voices in intercession for the hurting and powerless as we say to God, “Fix it; heal this land and bring comfort to the people!” In the words of scripture, we find words that address the timelessness of human need and human tragedy. **And**, we also discover that we, like Mary, can become God’s servants as God uses **us** to help fill the needs of the hurting. When we pray, crying out to God, **we** are **also** called to **action**. We are **called** to speak up and use our gifts for the common good, which we are doing as we stock our food pantries, as we daily test kids for Covid, as we continue working with refugees, and as we provide food to health care workers. Prayer is not just a passive plea. Prayer calls us to action, to work for the **good** of neighbor, and work for the change for which we pray. We will NOT be silent! We pray for this pandemic to end, so we will NOT be silent, and we **will** get vaccinated and boosted!

On the third day, when the wine ran out, **Mary the prophet** would not keep quiet. Jesus quietly addresses the problem and turns scarcity into abundance. There is now so much wine, there is enough for **all!** In Jesus, the one who provides enough wine for all,

we see a God who is deeply responsive to human need. In Jesus, we experience a God who is **so** responsive to human suffering that he entered the depth of **our** need and suffers **with** us, even to the point of being nailed to a cross. And then, on the third day, in the depth of monumental tragedy, hope was born, and the new wine flowed freely! **Hope** is deeply embedded in the Resurrection.

On this weekend, we celebrate the life of **another** prophet, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He was **also** a prophet who would **not** remain silent in the face of injustice. His speaking out helped to bring forth justice and change. When prophets speak out and call for justice, it truly is a form of prayer. As we honor Martin Luther King, Jr., and remember the many prophets who have gone before him, **we** **name** the problems and cry out to God to bring change and renew our lives and this land. And, that form of prayer also requires **us** to **respond** and **act** in ways that help bring about the newness of God's promises for **all** people. We trust God's promises and look forward to that grand and glorious day when the wine of God's abundance will again flow out of the disused, even abused dusty wine jars and into the streets where there **will** be dancing and joy. Then, we will join with the wine maker of Nazareth as we shout out, "L'chai-im! To life!"