

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**CALL TO WORSHIP:**

*God's love reaches to the heavens,
his faithfulness to the skies.*

*His righteousness is like the highest mountains,
his justice like the great deep.*

*With God is the fountain of life;
in his light we see light.*

(Psalm 36.5-6, 9)

Let us worship God.

HYMN: Songs of thankfulness and praise ... [verses 1-2, 5]

PRAYER OF APPROACH AND CONFESSION:

Almighty God, our Creator and our Father:

We come into your presence today to give you thanks for your love, your righteousness, and your faithfulness. We come also to seek your guidance, your strength, and your blessing, because we know we can't get along without you.

As we begin our worship, though, we confess that our love for you is nowhere nearly as strong as your love for us. We confess also that we often disregard your guidance, and try to make our way through life in our own strength. Our sinful, self-centered impulses keep drawing us away from you, and, as a result, we do things that displease you, and hurt the people around us.

Forgive us, gracious God, for failing to be the people you want us to be. Through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, then, strengthen us against our sinful impulses, we pray; empower us to live in your ways more faithfully and consistently; and enable us to live more authentically as your daughters and sons.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior; and we pray together now, as he taught us:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

(Matthew 6.9-13, KJV)

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

Hear this good news from the scriptures:

*God has shown his love for us in this:
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us;
we have been justified by his blood.*

(Romans 5.8-9)

So, if we have confessed our sin to God sincerely, let us be assured that God will forgive us.

SCRIPTURE READINGS:**- OT Reading:** Isaiah 62.1-5 - A new name for Jerusalem

This reading is a message of hope and encouragement to the people of Jerusalem. They have returned from exile in Babylonia, only to find the task of rebuilding their city very difficult and discouraging. The prophet announces that God will reverse their fortunes.

- Psalm: Psalm 36 - “I have a message from God in my heart”.

Psalm 36 is a *lament*, a prayer for God’s help.

In the *middle* of the psalm, though, we find words of *praise* to God, as we *often* do in laments. The writer praises God for his love, faithfulness, righteousness, and justice.

- Letter Reading: 1 Corinthians 12.1-11 - Gifts of the Spirit (Part 1)

This reading is the beginning of Paul’s lengthy discussion of “gifts of the Spirit”. In this reading, he makes his basic point: the Holy Spirit gives Christians a whole variety of “spiritual gifts”, which enable them, together, to do the various tasks of ministry.

- Gospel Reading: John 2.1-12 - Jesus changes water into wine

At this point in John’s Gospel, it is early in Jesus’ ministry; and by this time, he has at least five disciples.

Today’s reading is the story of the wedding banquet in Cana, at which Jesus turns a large amount of water into wine. According to John, this is the first public act of Jesus’ ministry, and also his first miracle.

HYMN: You are my all in all

SERMON:

In the Season after Epiphany, the lectionary has us read stories from the early days of Jesus’ ministry. On the *Second* Sunday after Epiphany, the story is always from the Gospel of John; for the rest of the season, we’ll go back to Luke’s Gospel, which we were reading from last week.

Today’s Gospel reading is the well-known story of the wedding in Cana, in which Jesus changes a large quantity of water into wine, after the wine has run out. It’s found only here in John; there are no parallel accounts in any of the other three Gospels. The story and the miracle that it contains constitute the first event in Jesus’ ministry, according to John. In the previous chapter, he has gathered at least five men around him, who become his disciples. They are two men who were originally disciples of John the Baptist, one of whom is Andrew; then Andrew’s brother, Simon, whom Jesus nicknames “Peter”; and then Philip and his friend Nathanael. Whether Jesus has gathered the whole group of twelve disciples by the time we get to today’s reading, John doesn’t say.

The fact that Jesus and his mother are invited to the wedding may indicate that either the bride or groom was a relative of theirs, but John doesn't actually tell us that, either. Incidentally, this is one of only two stories in John in which Jesus' mother appears; and, interestingly, John never refers to her by name.

As in all cultures, a wedding in First-Century Israel was a major occasion in the life of the community, and involved a big celebration. Indeed, commentators point out that Jewish wedding celebrations lasted a whole week — which may explain why the wine ran out at one point.

The story raises a number of questions. Why was Jesus' mother concerned about the fact that the wine had run out? When she told Jesus this, was she simply reporting the news to him, or was she expecting him to do something? And if she was expecting him to do something, what exactly did she expect him to do? Did she believe he had the power to do what he actually ended up doing?

The fact that Mary then told the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to do indicates that she may in fact have believed that he had the power to do something miraculous — unless, perhaps, she meant for him to give them some money, so they could buy more wine at the local Liquor Mart!

To the ears of English-speaking people, Jesus' reply to his mother sounds rude — calling her “Woman”, that is (John 2.4). Apparently, though, in John's original Greek, that was the proper way for a man to address a woman — although maybe not one's own mother! It's interesting that he says to her, *My hour has not yet come* (John 2.4), because, in the rest of John's Gospel, references to Jesus' “hour” refer to his death on the cross. Perhaps in this case, he means that it is not yet time for him to begin his public ministry, or to do something that would reveal his true identity.

Nevertheless, Jesus appears to let his mother prod him into doing the miracle that he does: turning a large amount of water into wine; for when she has told the servants, *Do whatever he tells you* (John 2.5), he instructs them to fill the six stone water jars with water. Each one held twenty to thirty gallons, John says (John 2.6), so, if they had been empty to start with, it would've taken a lot of work to fill them all!

The miracle itself is done in a most understated way. Jesus doesn't pray; he doesn't give any command; he simply tells the servants to draw some water out of the stone jars, and take it to the master of the banquet (John 2.8). By this time, the miracle has taken place, and the water is now wine — an abundance of wine, enough to last for the rest of the wedding celebration. Not only is there a large *quantity* of wine; it's also of excellent *quality*, as the master of the banquet comments to the groom (John 2.10). Only a few people are aware that a miracle has taken place, though — in addition to Jesus himself, only the servants, possibly Mary, and apparently also, Jesus' disciples.

In many ways, this is the strangest of Jesus' miracles. It's not a healing; no one's life is in dan-

ger; no one is brought back to life. The only thing that is saved is the reputation of the family hosting the banquet — which would've been badly damaged if Jesus had *not* performed the miracle. Strange also is the fact that the miracle is done almost in secret, with only a handful of people aware that a miracle has even happened.

So, what does it all mean?

Fortunately, John *does* provide an answer to *this* question. It's found in his editorial comment at the end of the story. John says, *What Jesus did here in Cana, Galilee, was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him* (John 2.11).

There are three significant words in that verse: “signs”, “glory”, and “believed”.

The word “sign” is the word that John normally uses for one of Jesus' miracles. He uses it also in connection with Jesus' healing of an official's son in Chapter 4, for example, as well as the feeding of the five thousand in Chapter 6. In the story that follows today's reading, John speaks of a number of “signs” performed by Jesus in Jerusalem, although he doesn't specify what they were. Likewise, in Chapter 3, Nicodemus says to Jesus, *We know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him* (John 3.2).

The word “sign” then, has a very specific meaning in John's Gospel. For John, Jesus' miracles are, above all, signs of Jesus' true identity — signs that either lead people to believe in him, or that confirm and strengthen their faith in him. At the end of Chapter 20, John makes this editorial comment on his entire Gospel, again making use of the word “sign”: *Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God; and that, by believing, you may have life in his name* (John 20.30-31).

The *second* key word at the end of today's reading is the word “glory”. It too is a word that John uses quite often. We encounter it first in the Prologue in Chapter 1, in which John says of Jesus, *The Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1.14). The word “glory” refers to God's splendor and power. As an attribute of God, glory is therefore an attribute that Jesus shares. So, in today's reading, when John says that the miracle in Cana was the first of the “signs” through which Jesus revealed his “glory”, he means that the miracle provided a glimpse of Jesus' true identity as the Son of God.

That brings us to the *third* key word at the end of today's story: “believed”. *His disciples believed in him*, John says. “Believe” also is a word that we encounter a lot in John's Gospel — more than in any of the other Gospels. To “believe” in Jesus is to recognize and acknowledge his true identity as the Messiah and the Son of God, as John says in the verses I quoted from Chapter 20. To say that Jesus' disciples “believed in him” after witnessing the miracle in Cana, then, means that the miracle — the “sign” — had its intended effect. It revealed Jesus' true identity, which the disciples recognized and accepted. This is not to say

that they didn't already believe in Jesus, because when they met him in Chapter 1, they already accepted that he was the promised Messiah. The miracle in Cana thus confirmed and reinforced their faith in him.

It appears, then, that the secretive miracle in Cana was done by Jesus mainly for the benefit of his *disciples*. There would be other times when Jesus' miracles would be more public, and would lead others to believe in him.

What we have in this story, then, is one more "epiphany" — one more event in which Jesus' true identity is "manifested", revealed, or disclosed to human beings, as it was in his baptism, in last Sunday's Gospel reading. The appropriate *response* to such an epiphany, then, is to recognize and accept Jesus' true identity, or as John puts it, to "believe" in him. This is the main theme of John's Gospel, and he repeats it over and over again. Very often also, he speaks of a divided response to one of Jesus' signs or sayings — that is, that *some* "believe", while others do not.

Believing in Jesus, then, makes it possible for human beings to become children of God. This is the point that John makes in his Prologue in Chapter 1, where he says of Jesus, *He was in the world, and, though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to his own people, but his own people did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God* (John 1.10-13). The apostle Paul speaks of God's *adopting* human beings as his children, but John speaks instead of *rebirth* — being "born again" as a child of God; being "born from above", being "born of the Spirit", as Jesus says in his conversation with Nicodemus in Chapter 3. Adoption and rebirth — two different images for the same reality.

Like the apostle Paul, the Gospel writer John emphasizes the necessity of belief — faith — for becoming a child of God. Faith indicates that a person is receptive to God. Unbelief, on the other hand, indicates that a person is resistant. Obviously, we can not become children of God or members of his family if we are resistant to God; it simply doesn't make sense.

The Prologue to John's Gospel states that Jesus came into the world in order to make it possible for us human beings to become children of God — that is, to be reconciled to God, to be in relationship with God, to receive God's gift of eternal life, and to have a share in the life of the age to come. These are gifts that God offers us, but in order to receive them, we need to accept them. Belief — or faith — is the attitude of receptiveness toward God that makes it *possible* for us to receive what God offers us. And faith is centered around Jesus, the one in whom God came into the world in order to reach out to us human beings, reveal himself to us, and draw us into relationship with him.

It's no wonder, then, that the Gospel writer John places such emphasis on the importance and necessity of faith. Remember the famous verse "John 3.16": *God loved the world so much*

that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life. This one sentence neatly sums up the message of John's entire Gospel.

In today's Gospel reading, then, at the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus performs a "sign" that reveals his true identity as the Son of God, primarily for the benefit of his disciples. The disciples witness the "sign", and respond with receptiveness and acceptance: they believe in Jesus. May we all do the same.

HYMN: All praise to you, o Lord!

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

God of power and love:

We give you thanks for revealing yourself to us in Jesus. We thank you that, through his person, his words, and his actions, you gave us human beings a better glimpse of yourself than you had ever done before. As we read the biblical accounts of his ministry, we realize that the power he wielded was your power, and that the love he expressed was your love. We realize that the miraculous things he did were not stunts intended to make him a celebrity, but rather signs of his true identity as Messiah and God the Son, as well as signs of your power breaking into the world to transform people, and to liberate them from the grip of the powers of evil, which do so much damage in the world. Help us to continue to watch for signs of your power breaking into the world today, bringing about healing, and challenging human sin and suffering. May we ourselves be transformed by your power, and may we be channels through which your power may reach the people around us.

Hear our prayers for our congregation and your entire church throughout the world. Help us to be attentive in listening to you, and diligent in serving you. Strengthen us against the forces of evil that exist in the world, as well as against our own tendencies to be complacent and indifferent. Help us to see ways in which we can take part in your work of bringing about healing, restoration, and justice in the world. Help us to see ways in which we can serve you, both within the life and work of the church and outside of it, in our workplaces, our neighborhoods, our community, and our business transactions. We pray as well for the work that our national church does through Presbyterian World Service and Development, to enable people to raise their standard of living. Guide and bless that work, we pray; and grant that it may make a real difference in people's lives.

We pray for members of our congregation, and others close to us, who are experiencing difficulties of various kinds; in particular, Pat Antoski, and *others* whom we now name before you: _____ . We pray for your comfort for those who are grieving, strength and healing for those who are injured or ill, wisdom and guidance for those who have major decisions to make, and encouragement for those dealing with stress, loneliness, or a major challenge. May each one feel supported and upheld by your presence and your blessing.

As we rejoice with those who rejoice, we celebrate with Lalaine and Ruth that they were finally

received as Canadian citizens this past week, after a lengthy delay.

As we pray for people in positions of authority today, we pray for business owners, managers, executives, supervisors, and those in similar positions. Grant them wisdom as they make decisions and deal with crises, we pray; and grant them compassion and a sense of fairness as they exercise their authority over others in the workplace.

We pray again about the pandemic, which continues to drag on with no end yet in sight. We ask your continued blessing on everyone experiencing stress, anxiety, frustration, discouragement, loneliness, or conflict, as well as those experiencing loss of business or loss of employment or income, and those waiting longer than usual for tests, treatments, or surgery due to the strain on the health care system.

We pray for residents of long-term-care homes, that they may receive the care and protection they're entitled to; and also for those who work in long-term care, as they strive to provide appropriate care under difficult circumstances. We ask your blessing also on those who work in daycare, and on the children they look after. We pray for teachers, students, administrators, and everyone else in the education system as in-person classes resume this week. May the necessary protection and support be provided, and may each one receive strength and inspiration to cope with the difficulties that the pandemic has created. And we pray as well for those who work in the health care system, that they may receive the strength and stamina they need to cope with the increased workload. Continue to give wisdom to those who give leadership in public health, as they make ongoing decisions on how best to manage the crisis and how eventually to bring the pandemic under control.

We thank you that you hear our prayers, gracious God; and we offer them up to you in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

OFFERING

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION:

Loving and faithful God:

We present to you now an offering of both material gifts and spiritual gifts, out of the material and spiritual gifts we have received from you. We do this in gratitude, in response to your great love for us, demonstrated in the person and work of Jesus — most of all, in his death and resurrection.

Accept the gifts we present to you, we pray, and use them for the building up of your church, for the strengthening of its work, and for the healing of the world that you love so much.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

HYMN: Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts ...

COMMISSIONING AND BLESSING:

Brothers and sisters in Christ:

Go into the week ahead, now,
in peace,

and in the strength of the Holy Spirit,
to continue living as those who are being transformed by God,
and to continue using the gifts he has given you to serve him.

And may God bless you:

May he guide and strengthen you each day,
and fill you with his peace and love;

in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.