

1.19.2025 Epiphany 2

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

*“Varieties of gifts”*

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

I have always liked the story of the wedding at Cana. Though there is no modern consensus about where Cana was located, the wedding at Cana must have been a large wedding; and therefore, the location, accessible to many. We are told that Jesus, his mother Mary, and the disciples had all been invited. That the wine gave out also suggests both a large and a lively wedding celebration. We might only imagine what it would have been like to be seated with Jesus as one of the wedding guests. That Jesus provided not just more wine, but even better wine, suggests that a celebration with Jesus will always overflow with enough of everything.

Located at the beginning of John’s gospel, this story is itself a sign of who is at the center of the gospel. Though we don’t know whose wedding it was, and we no longer know where Cana was, we do know that with Jesus at the center – any wedding, any gathering, any meal, any task, will be blessed by his presence with and through us. As the first of many signs, the wedding at Cana reveals Jesus at the center of human community.

In the brief exchange between Jesus and his mother Mary much is said that helps us understand their relationship as mother and son. We should not be surprised to see qualities in Jesus that we find in Mary, and this conversation reveals how well Mary knew her son. Relationships with parents are, of course, complicated, but the conversation between Mary and Jesus suggests that Mary expected her son to do something. *“They have no wine,”* is a comment suggesting a response from Jesus. We can only imagine that Mary was, of course, aware of an extraordinary dimension to her son that others were not yet aware of. Perhaps Jesus, too, was aware of his own spiritual gifts, yet in the mystery of the incarnation, Jesus had to grow into his gifts, as you and I must grow into ours.

Regarding Mary’s expectant words, that Jesus would do something, parents often see things in their children that they themselves cannot often see. Yet no child likes to be told by their parents what to do, so we hear Jesus’ rather testy sounding remark to his mother, *“Woman, what concern is that to me and you? My hour has not yet come.”* Mary had inside information about her son, and Jesus knew it. Perhaps Mary already knew what it was like to have the presence of Jesus at the table in her home in Nazareth.

I grew up in a parsonage and Sunday dinner was central to the week. It was expected that we would all be present. My mother may have prepared a meal just for the family, but on occasion

we had an unexpected guest or two. Would the pot roast, potatoes and gravy hold out? Could the homemade lasagna be stretched? At such moments, there was a family code word: my mother might say, “I heard from FHB this week.” Someone would respond, “Oh, FHB? How is old FHB?” And like Mary to Jesus, the message that there was not enough had been delivered by mother. “FHB” meant “family hold back” – there may not be enough food for our guest. I mention this because, while it involved no miracle, it did involve the ongoing “miracle of hospitality,” of finding a way to welcome others in the best way we can with what we have. Ensuring that the guest was given the best piece of chicken or the center-cut of lasagna hot with melted mozzarella and ricotta cheese.

This is what is at the center of the wedding at Cana: The hospitality of God. We are given gifts, especially the gift of the table, to be shared. Of course, it is easy to read into the wedding at Cana “a future last supper” in which the sharing of one cup continues to offer endless and eternal forgiveness for all people. Yet we would be remiss if we did not give thanks today for the table that Jesus continues to set among us, offering us the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation – the miracle of his true presence. Jesus gave new meaning to a meal and to eucharistic hospitality that gives new meaning to the other daily tables we share with so many.

Jesus’ presence at Cana changed everything. Jesus is the difference, and his presence in our lives continues to change everything. The gifts we each possess are not ours, but rather, they are gifts to be used by him through our hands and voices. Notice that Jesus was at work in the hands of the servants at the wedding; it was their hands that followed his command to fill the jars with water. I cannot stand here and tell you “how” water was changed into wine, but the point of the story is that through ordinary human hands, Jesus provided what was needed.

Each of us, as Paul writes, have “*varieties of gifts*,” gifts of knowledge, faith, wisdom, healing, prophecy, and languages. We might expand upon Paul’s list, adding things such as the gifts of music and song, design and architecture, finance and planning, property management and building upkeep, IT savvy and knowhow. I am convinced that each person has not simply one, but many gifts. A church is a place where the diversity and variety of the Spirit’s gifts come together for the unity and “*common good*” of expressing Christ’s love in this world. “God’s Work, in Our Hands,” to coin a phrase.

If you think miracles don’t occur, then you haven’t seen the power of faith. The empty baker’s rack that is filled to overflowing again and again with food for those in need; Soup Kitchen tables set week in and week out for the hungry in our community; the Men’s Group Emergency Food Pantry that supplies food to those in crisis who come to our door week in and

week out; and Room in the Inn offering the miracle of peace and safety amid the cold and hard reality of homelessness in our community.

Two Tuesdays ago, as I was a night-sitter at the Room in the Inn with Chris Stevenson. It was still early, about 8:30 pm but our guests were already turning in for the night. I went to check on the room where the men sleep, and a man called me over, and said, “Pastor, thank you for doing this.” He then said something quite profound, “Tonight, I’m sleeping in God’s house, and I get to talk to him all night in his house, and tomorrow morning, I will wake in God’s house. I know that I am safe because he is with me, and he will go with me.” The hospitality of God’s house leads to the ongoing miracle of faith. How many of us when we are in this building give thanks, like this man, for God’s presence, peace, and safety?

The ongoing miracle we are talking about today is the presence of Jesus at the center of our lives. He is the one who sends his Spirit to us; he is the one who helps us hold back so others can have enough to eat; he is the one who feeds and forgives us, so that we can be his presence in a cold and hard world.

At Cana, Jesus did the first of his signs, but the ongoing miracle is that through you, Jesus continues to do signs in this world. Jesus carries this theme through later in John’s gospel when he says, “*Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these...If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it*” (cf. Jn. 14:12-14). Seek his will, live in his name, and you will do great things for Christ.

Each Sunday, I look have the privilege to look upon this congregations and see people with varieties of gifts. You are Jesus’ living signs; you are the ongoing miracle of his hospitality.

He is the difference in your life, so that you can be the difference for others. Amen.