

Epiphany 2

1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

One of the little things I noticed when I did my first service at St Clement's was that we used white wine. I was a bit surprised because I had never been in a parish that didn't use red wine. I was especially aware of this because white wine gives me a headache so I really try to stay away from it.

I asked someone on the Altar Guild about it and was told it's easier to get out the stains with white wine – a very practical answer, to be sure. So I thought about this for a couple of weeks and tried to figure out a good way to change to red wine without causing negative feelings. Theologically and physically speaking, after all, Jesus didn't have white blood and that's what the wine is supposed to be for us – the blood of Christ.

Then one morning a month or so into my tenure, one of the 7:30 parishioners, John Belt, walked out through the shake-out line and as we were shaking hands, he looked at me and said, "Jesus is a bit anemic this morning, isn't he?"

Well, that comment gave me the nudge I needed and helped me find the words to have the altar guild change to a nice red port. Jesus' red blood cell count increased and my headaches went away.

Just this past week we needed to order more wine and they were out of our brand of port. We were recommended another port that was supposed to taste similarly. So we agreed to try it. When the box was delivered and Kerry asked me if I wanted to sample it, I said, of course. As she took out a bottle, she said, "This isn't port; it's a very dry sherry!" Hmmmm. Sherry. I don't mind a nice dry sherry with a nice mild cheese and tasteful cracker. But I remembered this was for communion and we don't do cheese and crackers. So we called the liquor people, sent it back, and the appropriate port was delivered.

Jesus didn't change the water into a cheap Boones Farm level wine – although he could have. Guests had already drunk through quite a bit of wine and wouldn't have noticed the difference. But he changed between 120 to 180 gallons of water into very fine wine.

This story is about the first time Jesus manifests his miraculous skills in public. As the passage says, he "revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him."

That's the point of the story. The point, by the way, is not a justification, model, and defense of marriage because Jesus was present. Unfortunately, the beginning of our marriage service uses it just that way. The point of the story is that this is the manifestation of one of Jesus' many gifts that begins to visibly demonstrate who he actually is.

I love the fact that Jesus did what his mother told him to do, even though he talked back at her. He said it wasn't his time yet to do something that would bring attention to himself. Her answer was to tell the servants to just do what Jesus told them. She knew he would do something about the wine shortage. And he did – he listened to his mother. She knew it was time for Jesus to start doing things that revealed who he actually was.

That's not a bad gift – performing miracles. Water into wine. It's one of the gifts Paul talks about in his letter to the Christians in Corinth. Unfortunately, I think the inclusion of that gift causes us to subconsciously think that we don't have most of the other gifts because we think they're as difficult to perform as is doing miracles.

Well, we're not Jesus so the expectations on us are not as high. Our bar is set a little more realistically. If we're smart or wise or are considered to be a healing presence during a time of trouble or illness; if we are seen as a person of faith; or if we can speak the truth in a time of turmoil or conflict; if we're someone who might help us to tell the difference between those words and actions that are of God and those that are not of God, then we've identified some of the gifts God gives us. Look around and see if you can identify people here who are smart or a healing presence or truth-tellers or people of deep faith. Raise your hand if you can pick out people with some of those gifts. How many of you chose yourself as the bearer of one of those gifts?

These gifts are given by the Spirit to each one of us for the good of the community – the common good – as Paul says. And that's how we are to use them. We don't step back and hide our lights under little bushel baskets. But we offer them and use them for the good of the community. We don't use them only for ourselves or a select few – they've been given to us for the uplifting of the community.

I wonder how many opportunities we miss in this faith community because of the refusal or even just the hesitancy of folks to share their God-given gifts. I do know we're missing a significant number because our participation rate in our ministries is a little over 50% of parishioners. Maybe it's time to help one another identify our spirit-given gifts and begin to develop ways to share those gifts for the good of the community – for the common good. Because if we share them here in the Parish of St Clement, I'm convinced that we'll begin to share them with those outside our community.

This is another kind of stewardship – a pledge, a commitment of our involvement in the life of the community. A recognition that not only our lives but the gifts, the talents we receive are from God – we have certainly participated in their development – but the source of these gifts, these talents, these skills is God. And the way we give thanks for our lives and for the gifts that have been given us is to manifest them in the community – just as Jesus manifested his gift for miracles at that event in Cana when the wine ran out. He gave it his best – wine, that is – and that's what we're called to give to the community – our best.

So I'm thankful that John Belt lived into his gift – we might say he had the gift of telling spirits apart – and did it in a way that was both funny and enabling and, even though he is no longer with us, we benefit from his sharing of his God-given gift every time we share communion. We each are in possession of God-given gifts – let's help one another identify them, let's listen and believe one another that we have gifts, and let's begin to share them with this community.

Amen.

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