

Sunday, January 16, 2022 – “The New and Growing Light of Christ”
– Bible Study & Reflection on 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 & John 2:1-11

Dear Members & Friends:

I invite you to read the following passages from 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 (*The Message* by Eugene Peterson) & John 2:1-11 (*Common English Bible*).

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

¹⁻³ What I want to talk about now is the various ways God’s Spirit gets worked into our lives. This is complex and often misunderstood, but I want you to be informed and knowledgeable. Remember how you were when you didn’t know God, led from one phony god to another, never knowing what you were doing, just doing it because everybody else did it? It’s different in this life. God wants us to use our intelligence, to seek to understand as well as we can. For instance, by using your heads, you know perfectly well that the Spirit of God would never prompt anyone to say “Jesus be damned!” Nor would anyone be inclined to say “Jesus is Master!” without the insight of the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁻¹¹ God’s various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful:

wise counsel

clear understanding

simple trust

healing the sick

miraculous acts

proclamation

distinguishing between spirits

tongues

interpretation of tongues.

All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. The Spirit decides who gets what, and when.

John 2:1-11

¹On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and ²Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. ³When the wine ran out, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They don’t have any wine.”

⁴Jesus replied, “Woman, what does that have to do with me? My time hasn’t come yet.”

⁵His mother told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶Nearby were six stone water jars used for the Jewish cleansing ritual, each able to hold about twenty or thirty gallons.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water," and they filled them to the brim. ⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some from them and take it to the headwaiter," and they did. ⁹ The headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine. He didn't know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew.

The headwaiter called the groom ¹⁰ and said, "Everyone serves the good wine first. They bring out the second-rate wine only when the guests are drinking freely. You kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ This was the first miraculous sign that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

We're in the season of Epiphany. Epiphany means manifestation. All of this Sunday's texts speak about the manifestation or revelation of God's work and presence among God's people in ancient Israel, during Jesus' & Paul's time, and among us today in our present age. Epiphany is also a season of light. The Light of God is helping us to see God at work in all times and places.

While we will not be reading the appointed Hebrew text from Isaiah 62:1-5 during our Worship Service, the prophet Isaiah speaks a comforting word to the exiles. They certainly need a word of comfort in their circumstances as we learned last Sunday. Israel was going through a second time of slavery, the first being slavery in Egypt. Israel's cities had been destroyed, the nation humiliated, and almost all of Israel had been loaded into cruel Babylonian exile, their second enslavement. Isaiah 62:1-5 has the prophet speak of the present moment, not as unmitigated disaster but as prelude to homecoming and return. The disaster of the present is not a perpetual condition but a transition into a joyous return to the land and to God.

This Sunday's appointed Gospel, John's account of the wedding at Cana, is unique to the Fourth Gospel. It is the first of Jesus' seven "signs." A sign is something that points to something else, something else of greater significance. We are to look at the sign and have our eyes open to greater significance than the sign itself. We listen to this story of water turned to wine, and we know that John means for us to see more than we first see. Water into wine? "The third day"? Why does Jesus' own mother seem clueless? Or does she know something that the rest of the partiers don't know? The servants know what Jesus had done, but the headwaiter did not know? How can that be? The story ends with the surprising statement that the disciples "believe." What did they believe? It's only the second chapter of John's Gospel, and Jesus has done no teaching at this point. Somehow, somehow, the eyes of the disciples have been opened, and they believe on the basis of what they see. Maybe the Gospel writer, through this strange story, is prompting us to desire the same.

The mother of Jesus, who appears so enigmatically in this story of the wedding, appears just one more time in the Gospel of John, at the foot of the cross. In this exchange between Jesus and his mother, when Jesus says, "My hour has not yet come," we the readers know that Jesus is surely pointing ahead toward his death. The episode becomes a sign pointing from the beginning of the story of Jesus to the end. Jesus' mother thus brackets Jesus' earthly ministry, a witness as Jesus mysteriously begins his ministry and then again as Jesus horribly, but wondrously, ends his ministry.

Mary says, "Do whatever he tells you." Perhaps she is pointing us toward revelation. Greater, deeper significance is about to break forth through this story. John is thereby enabling us to see something that we could not see without the help of this story.

Mary is an eyewitness participant, but even the mother of Jesus doesn't seem to know what to make of all these events at the party after the wedding, nor do we without the help and light of God's Spirit. As we heard the psalmist declare in our Call to Worship, "In your light, we see light." Though Mary is Jesus' mother, she seems to be as baffled by the strange, wondrous actions of Jesus as everyone else. The changing of water to wine is an amazing sign, but to what does the sign point?

Ambiguity, mystery, and not easily answered questions. Welcome to the good news as presented in the Fourth Gospel. And yet, this first sign is clearly meant to be a hint, a suggestion, a sign that points us toward something of mysterious but wondrous significance.

And yet, we are confident that John's Gospel does not tell us this story of the wedding party at Cana in order to confuse us or to obfuscate. Somehow this is to be revelation. This is an epiphany given to us to help us see who Jesus is and what he is up to.

The season of Epiphany, in the northern hemisphere, coincides with the season of growing light. After the winter solstice in December, it takes some time to feel the new light, but at last, in January, slowly day-by-day, we begin to notice a new strength, a growing life, in the light. John's Gospel has proclaimed that Jesus, "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:9 – *NRSV*). Like the January light of Epiphany, that True Light takes time to emerge and grow, and increase in strength. What will this new and growing Light of Christ reveal?

I'm wondering about what Christ's light will reveal as we go through almost two years now of COVID-19 and its variants. The pinhole of light at the end of the pandemic tunnel seems to be getting incrementally bigger, or at least it seems to be.

A year ago, we longed to "get back to normal." We speculated on, "When will this be over?" "I'd give anything to go back to my old daily routines," many kept saying.

Perhaps it was only natural for us to look upon the time of COVID-19 and the time of racial justice reckoning through Black Lives Matter as temporary sidetracks to the course of things. "The economy is in a sad state right now, but eventually things will open up, we'll go back to work, the masks can come off and we will be 'back to normal,'" we said then and still are saying now in an attempt to reassure ourselves.

Will the sun rise again? Is there light over the horizon and at the end of the tunnel? Jesus' birth, baptism, and ministry seek to answer such questions. Since Jesus' entrance into the world, life would never be normal again. God's new and growing light would shine into the darkness. And yet, Jesus would end up on a cross.

Would there have been the international outcry at the murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police if his murder had not been videoed and then posted for millions to see? Many black lives have been taken in similar circumstances. And yet, actually to see this horrific event, not to turn our eyes away but to stare at the sheer brutality and inhumanity of this act, propelled millions into the streets demanding change.

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” “We’ve got some difficult days ahead . . . “But it really doesn’t matter with me now, because I’ve been to the mountaintop ... I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land.” We know all too well these prophetic words spoken by Martin Luther King, Jr.

It’s one thing to have your eyes opened, to receive a vision, it’s another thing to know what to do about it. It’s one thing to see what needs to be done, quite another thing to actually do it. We will see it. It will be sad if, having our eyes opened to the truth we could not avoid, we simply close our eyes, and proceed right down the pathway round before. That’s true for our nation and world right now. That’s true for our church right now. Who was it who said that sometimes humanity learns from its mistakes, but most of the time we just pick ourselves up, brush ourselves off, and proceed right down the path on which we stumbled before?

Christ our Light came into the world to enlighten all people. Jesus turned water into wine. He changed the world forever. Christ’s light continues to shine through our actions. The Apostle Paul calls those enlightened actions gifts of the Spirit for the common good.

Sometimes, when our eyes are opened, we are paralyzed with fear over the prospect before us. There are other times when we can for the first time clearly see something wrong, but we can’t see beyond the wrong to do what is right. There are other times when we see something, but what we see is so difficult to look at, that we close our eyes, look away, or yearn for distraction. Perhaps that will be the case for us in the present moment.

It’s too early to tell. And yet, we have been given a vision, a site that we just cannot get out of our brains. We have seen a man who was murdered, gasping, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” We have seen another man who was murdered, pleading, “I can’t breathe!”

We have been living through apocalyptic, visionary, revealing times. We pray, “In your light, we see light.” Where will we go from here?

We’ll see.

Peace & Light Through Christ our Sovereign,

Pastor Greg Rupright