

Jesus Exposed - sign of new things to come

expose [ik'spōz] verb [with obj.]

make (something) visible, typically by uncovering it: *at low tide the sands are exposed.*

• leave (something) uncovered or unprotected: *with no roof, the house was exposed to the elements.*

I keep having this dream... I think it's a version of that often recounted dream of showing up somewhere and thinking everything is normal... until you look down and realize you are not wearing any pants!

In my dream, it is usually Sunday morning and I'm at a church somewhere, often in a church that's a mix of different places I've been with a few unrecognizable details thrown in. The worship service is getting ready to begin ...and I've forgotten something in the office. I go back to get it but it's not there. I suddenly remember it might be at home and I jog over to get it (in some dreams I live in a very different house). When I get to my house, I can't find it there either. And that's when I discover I'm not even dressed for worship. I still have shorts and a T-shirt on. I start looking for clothes but everything in my closet doesn't fit or is very dirty or doesn't match. Then somehow I appear back over at the church, usually in back, and it's a totally different church, usually a much bigger one filling with more and more people. I try to just put on my robe but I can't find the right one and my stole is not in my office but up front. And the people keep coming...And then the music starts... And the bishop shows up...And on and on...until the absurdity of the whole thing wakes me up!

Now it doesn't take a masters in psychology to realize that dreams like this are about our fears of being "**exposed**". Clothing is a "sign" representing our identity and in our dreams we are working out that delicate balance between how we act and how we think... how we present on the outside verses how we feel on the inside. Am I really the competent and caring pastor people tell me I am...or will I be "exposed" as unprepared, completely inadequate... half-dressed?

In the rhythm of the church year, we are in the season of Epiphany: the time of revealing or enlightenment. The gospel texts we hear in these weeks, beginning last Sunday with Jesus' baptism and divine declaration, all "**expose**" Jesus in one way or another. I like that word (expose) because not only does it have a sense of revealing something hidden, it also implies the sense of vulnerability that usually accompanies questions about identity... and clothing!

At his baptism, Jesus was **exposed** as Son of God by a voice from heaven and the physical presence of the Holy Spirit, but if we would have kept reading a little farther, we would have witnessed evil trying to exploit the vulnerabilities that come with such a claim. "If you are the son of God... then prove it on my terms", the accuser says.

Today the gospel reading moves us out of Luke and into John where Jesus is **exposed** again. But this time there is no voice from heaven telling us who Jesus is. Instead Jesus himself discloses his identity as messiah using a "**sign**". Take note, if you haven't already, that the writer of John's gospel never uses the word "miracle" to describe the deeds of Jesus. They are always "**signs**" that point to something much bigger than the events at hand. In the wedding at Cana, Jesus **exposes** the nature of the **love** he embodies by turning water into wine.

It is love undeserved,
 love filled with blessing,
 love in abundance.
 love that transforms!

Jesus doesn't communicate all of this truth with the words he speaks or even the actions he takes. *(After all, the only thing he really "does" is tell some servants to put water in jars and then take a sample to the host.)* And yet, something HAS happened.

- * Stone jars used for religious washing now hold wine for communal JOY.
- * A celebration threatened by scarcity now overflows with abundance!
- * A teacher gains the trust of his followers, all thanks to his mom!
- * And when we are conditioned to expect the worst, God provides the best.

The turning of water into wine at the wedding in Cana is a **sign that exposes the graciousness of God** and points toward the ultimate exposure of Jesus' "glory" when he gives his life for the sake of the world.

Now it's essential to recognize that the sign itself is not the most important thing. Jesus does not **expose** himself as some kind of magic winemaker to impress his friends. In the modern world we may wonder how molecules of water can suddenly become molecules of sugar, acids, tannins, and alcohol. To me, that's not at all important. Sometimes we get so caught up in **the spectacle of** the sign, that we fail to let ourselves be **exposed** to its truth."

And the truth is found in the person of Jesus, not in the wine he created.

- * Jesus has come to "pour out" and "serve up" God's abundant grace.
- * Jesus not only cleans us on the outside but transforms us on the inside and
- * when violence, tragedy or grief make the world appear out of joy, the Spirit of LIFE finds a new reserve of hope to keep the party going.

But is this a sign only for 2000 year old disciples or is it still a sign for us, **exposing** a better truth and transforming the way things have always been done?

Can this sign still show us something about our own identity? Can it counter our own fears of being exposed as "less" than what we were made to be? Can this sign be courage for us? Can it be hope? Can it still transform hearts?

I believe it can, especially if we start thinking of ourselves as liquid in stone jars.

We are, after all, sitting in a vessel literally made of stone right now. The only question is are we water or are we wine? Who are we really? There are likely a whole chorus of voices telling you right now that you are nothing that special; voices trying to **expose** each one of us as a fraud, as someone who doesn't deserve God's grace and has no real power or ability to do anything of real value anyway.

But that would be the water talking, not the wine! For this Jesus, this wine maker, has done for us, and for the whole world, something truly miraculous: he has **exposed** the depths of God's love. He has loved us as we are - even while we are still sinners - and that Diving Love transforms us. We have a new identity. We drink the wine of the new covenant and it changes us from the inside out.

That part is already done. We don't have to spend our lifetime trying to get right with God. We couldn't do that if we had a hundred lifetimes. The truth we preach is that God has already accomplished all things for our salvation. The only question is whether or not we will be poured out or remain bottled up in a stone jar?

When do you think the "sign" in our gospel text happened? Was it when the jars were filled? Or did the transformation only happen because the stuff inside the jars got out and encountered the party? Could the same also be true of us? Might the "really good stuff" be found as we share the riches of God's grace with the people we encounter? Maybe our God given identity is only truly **exposed** when it is mingled with justice for oppressed, kindness towards the stranger, and peace in a violent world.

Tomorrow is marked with "signs" of national significance. We inaugurate our President and at the same time celebrate the life of Martin Luther King jr. Both events remind us that God calls us to live out our grace-filled identity as citizens of the global village. There is no sitting on the sidelines, no nurturing of our relationship with God apart from our relationships with others.

So let us be exposed for who we are: sinners yes but sinners who have been redeemed by the blood of the lamb who are poured out as blessing and JOY and love in the world. Let us take a stand against violence, against prejudice, against greed, against selfish consumption.

Let instead remember that Love Divine, Love excelling above all else, lives within us. The Spirit gifts us with wisdom, knowledge, faith, and healing that are meant for the common good. We are who God has made us, created for good works for the glory of God. We do not have to worry about being **exposed** as anything less. Amen.