

January 17, 2016 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany  
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

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

Let us pray....

Grace and Peace to you, beloved of Christ. Amen.

**Reflecting back** on 40 some years working at the big university hospital, this is what Dorothy had to say:

"I love working at the hospital. I save people's lives."

Dorothy isn't the sought after heart surgeon. She's not the cancer researcher.

She isn't the nurse who runs the Surgical ICU, or the life-saving staff on the Psychiatric Units.

Dorothy has some mild developmental delays, always has—and years ago she was assigned to the custodial crew, and that's been her life's work.

Dorothy went on, "I clean the rooms. I save people's lives because they can heal and sleep better when their room is comfortable, when it's clean."

**"Do whatever he tells you."**

That's what Jesus' mother, Mary, tells the servants at the wedding feast: **Do whatever he tells you.**

All that confidence after what in our cultural context is some not-so-becoming sassiness, or at least snarkiness from Jesus to his mother.

Different culture, different tone, different communication, and still: Do whatever he tells you.

And so they do:

**Jesus** gives the orders: Fill up those massive, stone water jugs, fill them up and then take some to the chief steward.

**The servants** follow the orders, privy to Jesus' direction, his miracle:

filling jugs with 20 or 30 gallons, when the water comes from the well, or perhaps a cistern or spring, and these tremendous jugs are made of stone—that just can't be easy, or quick, or dry, but they do it.

**The chief steward** (Mr. Carson, for those of us devoted to Downton Abbey)—The chief steward's job, most likely his livelihood, on the line as this wine crisis unfolds.

These wedding feasts lasted 5 or 6 days and running out of libation on the third day is not simply a little tacky, or unfortunate, but a hospitality disaster.

This wine represents abundance and harvest, quite literally blessing, *and when you run out of blessing...that's just not the message you want to send.*

But there's the chief steward talking in hushed tones to the bridegroom: You saved the best, the very best? And not just a little, not just enough for the rest of the feast, but enough for weeks more of feasting? Really?

**Oh, we could talk today** about Jesus' grace, about Jesus' miracle of abundance, when the word on the street (and in the stock market)—then and still now—is scarcity, not enough, never enough.

**Instead today, I'm watching Mary and the ways she witnesses to that miracle of abundance.**

They all had a hand in it, didn't they?

Jesus, of course, but Mary: Do whatever he tells you.

And those servants who were in on the secret, and the chief steward trying to be in control.

**There was this line** in last week's gospel, in that story of Jesus' baptism, the line about how the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus as a dove, in bodily form—*incarnation*, we might say!

This week, too, the Holy Spirit is present in bodily form: the form of Mary's confidence, and the servants labor and sweat, and chief stewards willingness—or desperation—not to force it, but to let it happen.

We always talk about *Jesus'* miracle, about *Jesus'* epiphany, but you can't tell me this isn't a team effort.

**And that sends me back to our second reading, from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians:**

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit:

And there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;

and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

To each is given the manifestation (the epiphany) of the Spirit for the *common good*."

This list of spiritual gifts, you can take a look at it, let's call it a starter list, just the beginning—we could add more!

Perhaps it's not even so helpful, for these are high profile gifts: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, tongues and the interpretation of tongues.

Some of these, at least, are the kinds of gifts that Lutherans so often don't claim, or at least not out loud.

But when we're truly honest, and when given some space to be "okay"—at, say, wisdom, maybe not 100% of the time, but occasionally, more or less having the gift of wisdom—then Paul's list might just fit.

Someone shakes their head, "Oh, I don't have the gift of healing, I just spend my days taking care of my daughter struggling with depression," or "Caring for my mother as she faces her age."

I suspect, dear friends, we have a serious under-confidence in the gifts of the Spirit.

**So, here's my conviction, my witness:**

The Holy Spirit is working plenty, abundantly, in each of us, and in us as a community.

We just have to make space and some holy conversation to witness to the Spirit's activity amongst us.

That's what Mary is doing and it's so profound: Do whatever he tells you.

Mary sets the scene, she knows the Spirit is at work, and she knows that together miracles happen.

Do we have space to name the gifts we see in one another?

Or even a comfort with our language for speaking of these gifts?

Rather than being spectators, something wonderfully participatory happens when the Spirit is in the mix.

I felt it last Sunday at the Worship Workshop—around tables we bubbled with possibilities.

It happened again at the Youth Sexuality Retreat on Friday evening—we got honest about God's gift of our bodies and sexuality and our responsibility to live out our values as we care for this gift.

Something wonderfully participatory happens when the Spirit is in the mix.

I wonder if that's at least part of what Dr. King knew, as he lamented, even agitated from Birmingham Jail.

We can expend a lot of energy trying to hold back, trying not to speak from our beliefs, our convictions, but the Holy Spirit is at work, incarnate, in-fleshed in you, and in me, and in this beloved community.

**Whenever I worry** that I might be preaching too much about justice, or showing up too often at city hall with a voice of the faith community responding to this oppression or another,

I remember the King Day gathering I attended last year at Luther Seminary—some of you were there. Right after lunch, there was a Q and A conversation with Pastor David W. Preus—a tremendous church leader and a former pastor here at Hope.

Pastor Preus spoke about his experience of the civil rights movement, his public and religious leadership, and his work bringing Dr. King to the Twin Cities back in that time.

Listening to Preus that day, I had no idea that the Spirit would lead me to Hope, but this congregation's justice making, this Holy Spirit incarnation, is part of our DNA as a community of believers.

**In a few speeches and sermons**, Dr. King said something to this effect:

"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michaelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry.

He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say,

'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'"

**The Holy Spirit be with you**, beloved community: With you, and in you, and enacted in everything you do.

**And may we have eyes, like Mary, to witness to the miracle of all these gifts. Amen**