

January 16, 2022
2nd Sunday after Epiphany
The Rev. Susan Plucker

Isaiah 62:1-5
John 2:1-11

Many years ago, Helen Johnstone, our diocesan secretary for Northern California,
Wrote an article for the newsletter while Bishop Lamb was away.
I saved that article and often bring it out for Epiphany preaching,
As I did this week.

Helen wrote:

“This week my corner of the office has taken on a certain rare STILLNESS.
Not from lack of work, but from something else.

This rare stillness offers a chance to take a deep breath
And contemplate the newness of the year
And all that lies ahead;
Not with a sense of being overwhelmed,
But with more of a sense of excitement
As to what is to be accomplished
And what we shall see unfold.

As someone who enjoys language,
I love the special “language” of our religious tradition
for instance, the word “Epiphany”.

Isn't it a lyrical sound?
Holding a certain mystery and magic?
It's one of those “envelop words”,
Filled with messages and images
Carried down through the centuries.

Into the depth of cold midwinter comes the imagery
Of light and love and guidance
On the path we travel,
All wrapped up in a word,
EPIPHANY.

What that must have meant in days when light and warmth
Was not summoned with the flick of a switch.

And yet, perhaps there can be even more meaning
To an “epiphany” today
When all the obvious comforts
Are to be had on demand
And the soul still searches alone in the darkness
for guidance and light for the days to come.

So, I pray for all of us that this Season of Epiphany
Will enlighten our hearts
To see God's will in all that we undertake."

Thank you, Helen.
Epiphany: Light and love and guidance....

Let's look at the story of Jesus at the wedding feast
With those eyes, the eyes of Epiphany.

Most often, the wedding at Cana story,
Is seen as the first public revelation of God's power
Working in Jesus.

It is also symbolically interpreted as pointing toward
The death and resurrection of Jesus
And the gift of his body and blood,
His provision of the wine of life for us.
And as such holds a good deal of power and truth.

Yet there is a question that flits through my mind
When I hear or read this story
That pushed me to reflect further.

What happened to make Jesus change his mind
About responding to his mother's concern?
What happened to make Jesus change his mind?

When his mother said to him,
"They have no wine."
His response was:
Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?"

I don't know about you,
But that sounds to me like:
We need to mind our own business here.
And then he said: "My hour has not come."

Marriage ceremonies in Cana of Galilee in biblical times
Were not at all like Episcopal weddings of today
A wedding party was hands down, the event of the year.

People looked forward to marriage celebrations for months.
The party went on for seven days.
It is said that Rabbis abandoned their fasts,
And students their studies.

Everyone brought gifts and in return
The host was expected to keep his guests well supplied
With food, drink, music, and merrymaking
FOR SEVEN DAYS!!!
The wine running out was more than a minor disappointment.
It was a catastrophe!

We can't even come close to understanding the ramifications of this disaster
With our scattered, mobile, and private family structures.
It really did matter what the neighbors thought.
Failure in the realm of hospitality
In that very much shame-based culture...
was a family disaster,
An extended family disaster
That any true friend would want to help divert if they could.

Being the season of Epiphany,
I was moved to ponder that perhaps...
Just perhaps...
Mary was moved to speak to Jesus by another power
besides that of friendship, love, compassion.

Remember Mary's willingness to listen to God?
Listen to and do God's will even before Jesus was born?

I imagine by now, some maybe 30 years later,
Mary has had even more practice in discerning and doing God's will,
Having her heart enlightened...
As Helen so poetically said for us.

What made Jesus change his mind?
What helped him to decide it was
Not his time to keep silent,
Not his time to rest,
As we heard in Isaiah?

The answer that I find in our Gospel reading
Is the simple persistence of his mother.

Notice Mary's response to Jesus' reply.
If her feelings are hurt
She does not let that get in the way.

She is, once again, the model of faithfulness to God's will.
She relinquishes that special relationship as mother.
She insists on nothing
She suggests nothing
She demands nothing.

Most often, that is not this mother's response.

At the least, suggestions flow from my mouth.

"But Jesus, don't you think it would be better if...."

Mary understands, as she has probably understood from the beginning,

That something more than the human interaction of mother and son

Must take place here.

God is definitely in the mix.

This doesn't mean that Mary is passive.

Again, notice how she responds.

Even though she has no idea what Jesus might do,

She makes space, allows room for he and God to act.

Mary turns and speaks to the servants, saying:

"Whatever he tells you, do it."

This would not have been an easy response for Mary.

She's pushing Jesus, or at least, making room

For Jesus to be on his way, the way God intends for him,

A way which will not be absent of pain and suffering,

As she has already be told by Simeon.

Making room for Jesus to be on his way...

Jesus said it wasn't yet time...

Mary's response says:

I don't accept that.

You may be wrong, Jesus.

Today, this hour and place

Might just be your time.

This is Mary making room for Jesus to be on his way,

God's way,

After 30 years of their being together.

Imagine with me

Jesus finally hearing God's will in Mary's persistence,

In her simple, yet clever rebuff of his wish

For people to begin to know and see him as the chosen one of God, just yet.

What are you waiting for Jesus?

Its time.

Imagine Jesus hearing God's will

And changing his mind about stepping out to begin the journey God has for him;

That journey of pouring out his life for us

Living among us, teaching, healing, feeding, forgiving, dying.

Beginning his journey as God incarnate,
God appearing,
God made manifest to the world.
Bringing light, love and guidance.

As Helen said
Epiphany is a magic word.

Into the depth of chilly midwinter comes the image
Of abundance (ultimately twenty-one hundred glasses of wine)
And more than enough light and love and guidance
For the path we are called by God to travel
All wrapped up in a word,
Epiphany.

God's guidance is there for us,
Just as it was for Joseph, for Mary, for Jesus,
For shepherds, wisemen, John.
Thank God that we have their Epiphany stories to point the way.

May this season of Epiphany continue to enlighten our hearts
To seek and respond to God's will in all that we undertake
As it brings us light, love and guidance.