

Olney Presbyterian Church

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

January 16, 2022

Meditation for Worship Preparation

*Paul begins a discussion of “spiritual gifts” with some new believers by saying he doesn’t want them to be “deceived or uninformed” (1 Cor. 12:1). He then points out “there are varieties of gifts”, “varieties of services” and “varieties of activities” all with one thing in common. Whether it is a gift, a service, or an activity which is given; the one bestowing it is the Lord. Paul also emphasizes whatever the manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s gift, there is also only **one purpose** for it: it is to use “for the common good.” The young church at Corinth experienced jealousy and competitiveness about those gifts present in the group. Paul tells them all gifts are to be used to build up each other (and the church/community), not for individual status or self-interest. Perhaps this is a lesson we all still need to consider about our gifts.*

Prelude

Abba, Father, Fry

Some verses from Psalm 36 form the suggested Lectionary reading for this morning. Verse 5: “Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Verse 7 us also extremely meaningful: “How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.” God’s steadfast love and faithfulness to those God has claimed is the foundation of all that has been revealed to us about our God. These are the bedrocks of our faith and why we can join the psalmist in proclaiming:

This is the Day the Lord has made; **Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

Welcome & Announcements

Our call to worship this morning is based on the words of the psalmist who wrote Psalm 36 for as we gather we lift our own praise for the truths of God’s love and faithfulness found in the psalm and our own praise and thanks for them. **Please stand as you are able** as we begin our worship with the call found in the bulletin.

*Call to Worship

Based on Psalm 36

No matter how far we wander from you, O God;

Your steadfast love finds us.

No matter how unjust and violent the world seems, Lord;

Your steadfast righteousness sustains us.

No matter how vulnerable our lives seem to us, O God;

You hear our cries; answer our prayers; bring strength.

For with you is the fountain of life, light in darkness;

Thanks and praise to you, O Lord.

Our opening hymn of praise celebrates with song the gifts of grace and mercy we have received through God's steadfast love and faithfulness for those God has claimed. The hymn is found as #466 in the Presbyterian Hymnal and is titled *O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing*.

*Hymn of Praise

O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing

#466, PH

The Apostle Paul teaches that there are a variety of gifts among us, yet all are given by the same Spirit for the same purpose. However, we often use our gifts for other purposes than to build up the ways of the kingdom God desires to become present on earth. Let us together acknowledge this truth using the prayer of confession found in today's bulletin.

*Prayer of Confession

Almighty God, we confess we have been led astray by the idols of our world. How we must try your patience with our ways. We often doubt when we should place our trust in your abiding presence with us. We have depended upon possessions. We have sought security in the might of the sword instead of the strength of your Holy Spirit. We think we have to have all the answers instead of depending upon your wisdom. We judge others who fail to live up to our expectations but reject your judgment of our world. We think we are the one who matters most in life placing ourselves at the center of our universe. Forgive us for the shallowness of our faith. Lead us to true understanding and repentance that we may serve you faithfully as your transformed people with joy. Through Christ we lift this prayer. Amen.

*Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news we celebrate: our God is a loving God, full of mercy. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Believe in this forgiveness; be at peace and respond with grateful service in the living of God's kingdom's ways.

*Hymn of Response

Have Thine Own Way

Have Thine Own Way, Lord! Have Thine Own Way!

Thou art the potter, I am the clay!

Mold me and make me after Thy will,

While I am waiting, yielded and still.

Please be seated.

Let us now pause a moment before we begin to read our texts and seek the message within them for us in order to quiet our thoughts; to open our minds and hearts to receive what the Spirit's presence among us would have us know. Let us pray.

Prayer for Illumination

Holy God, we need the guidance of your word and presence with us. Quicken our understanding so we may receive the testimony of our scriptures and believe the signs among us that reveal your presence with us. May the words read and spoken here today convey the message that you have for your people in this place at this time. Amen.

Our first reading is from a letter thought to have been written by the Apostle Paul after he had left the group at Corinth to take the gospel to the city of Ephesus. Written about twenty years after Christ's death it was directed to a largely gentile population living in a prosperous seaport where many cultures dwelled. Among those of great wealth, there were also many who were poor. The wealthy of Corinth has a reputation for abuse of the poor. Much of Paul's letter to this group was directed toward resolving conflicts that have arisen among them because of this mixing of people from various groups who have been drawn together by the good news of the gospel message. Hear Paul's message about the movement and the gifts of the Holy Spirit moving among them.

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| Epistle Lesson | 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 | P.1785, Pew Bible |
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| Musical Interlude | <i>Holy, Holy</i> , Owens |
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Our gospel lesson this morning is from the 2nd chapter of John's gospel. Within John's gospel there are seven actions of Jesus which are described as signs of his identity as the Son of God. This passage which describes a wedding in the village of Cana is unique to John's gospel and is the first sign recorded by John. This sign appears early in the narrative, after that beautiful prologue and John's account of Jesus' baptism. Four of his disciples have been called to come and see just who he is when they go with him to this wedding. Listen to what this passage tells us about Jesus as he began his work proclaiming the kingdom was near as found in John 2:1-11.

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| Gospel Lesson | John 2:1-11 | P.1648, Pew Bible |
| The Word of God for the people of God | | |
| Thanks be to God! | | |

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| Sermon | Learning to Tell Time | Elizabeth Sigmon |
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The gospel of John focuses on the actions of Jesus as signs given to demonstrate to us of Jesus' identity, not events or acts upon which we should focus. When we come to affirm our faith our focus also should be on what they tell us about God's nature and desire for relationship with us. **Please stand as you are able** as we affirm our faith using the Nicene Creed.

*Affirmation of Faith

Nicene Creed

I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds; God of God; Light of Light; Very God of Very God; Begotten, not made; Being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; Who for us, and for our salvation, came down from heaven; and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven; and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost; The Lord and Giver of Life; Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; Who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the resurrection of the dead; and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Please be seated.

Our affirmations of faith confirm and acknowledge God's active care for us and all the created world, visible and invisible through the sending of Jesus to reveal God's steadfast love. Because we have confidence in God's love and care, we can bring before our Lord our concerns as we offer prayers of intercession for our broken and needy world. Let us pray.

Prayers of Intercession & Lord's Prayer

Holy One, Sovereign God, you are our refuge and our strength. By your presence shelter us from life's storms, from pandemic pain, from heartache and loss. Strengthen us to withstand the worry, the exhausting but necessary work, the temptations to stray from you toward idols who offer fleeting comfort. Hold us close, aware of your presence with us through all of life's journey so we can know we are yours in joy and sorrow, that feeling your steady presence we can know your peace. God, you are in the midst of all that happens: in the city, in the nations which are in an uproar, in the kingdoms which totter. Help us to know your presence among

us. God, comfort us with the strength of your guidance in a world experiencing so much pain and upheaval. May our world's leaders walk humbly and practice faithful discernment, surrounding themselves with honest truth-tellers who will hold them to your ethic of love and justice. Lord, help us to be still and know that you are God and with us. Open our eyes and hearts to see where you are present and working so we may give thanks and praise; so we may join in aiding your work to prosper among us. Help us to be still so we may forget about the work still left to be done, the chores piling up, the deadlines approaching. Help us to rest here in your presence. Help us to behold you and belong to you. We cannot continue without the rest and peace you provide. Help us to embrace this stillness as your great gift to us. As the body of Christ we lift these prayers to you, our Savior and Sovereign Lord. Hear us now as we pray the prayer Christ taught us by saying together, Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen

Our God blesses us with many blessing, so abundantly that we often fail to recognize them. Grateful for all that we receive, let us present our tithes and offerings to the Lord.

Offering

Offertory

How Clear Is Our Vocation, Lord, Parry

*Doxology

Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow

*Prayer of Dedication

Gracious Lord, just as you turned gallons of water to wine in response to a need, we also know the abundance of your extravagant blessings. Take these gifts we give today and bless them, Holy God, that others may know your abundance and live whole and healthy lives. Amen.

Our hymn of sending is in many ways a musical prayer asking our Lord to draw closer to us and give us the gift of seeing God's presence with us more clearly—of being able to see what God desires from us as faithful disciples. The title is *Be Thou My Vision* and it is #339 in the Presbyterian Hymnal.

*Hymn of Sending

Be Thou My Vision

#339, PH

*Charge and Blessing

God's grace is extravagant and abundant. Know this grace in your life. Share the news of this grace and show this grace to others. Our gifts from God are many and as Paul wrote they are to be used for others. This is our charge as God's beloved and faithful.

May God our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer bless you this day and forevermore. Amen

Postlude

The Church's One Foundation, Wesley

Learning to Tell Time

Learning to tell time is one of those activities that happen very early in a child's life—and there are two aspects to this process. The first aspect is begun with toys of bright colors and learning your numbers, in particular the numbers around a clock face which either say something or do something when the right number is pushed or placed into a slot. Some of Jack's toys already do this. The association with certain events and those numbers comes later—when you have lunch or can go and do something and the time seems fixed. The other sense of time develops as part of the waiting for those events begins to be associated with elapsed time periods...how long before we can go out? How long until my favorite activity begins? As human beings we are often governed by this linear time in our daily lives: called chronos time. And we really don't understand Kairos—God's time. Throughout the gospel of John there is a repeated emphasis on time—specifically the hour to which Jesus refers in today's passage which is associated with God's timing for Jesus' purpose. It seems that the timing of that hour is central to the life and ministry of Jesus which begins here. And that first association of what Jesus does; what he has come to do with time, is made in this first of the events in that life of ministry. However, there seems to be some disconnect between Jesus and his mother about what time it is. The scene narrated is a wedding which occurs in the village of Cana. We are not told who is being married but just that the mother of Jesus was there. Her relationship is not given and the phrasing indicates that she was probably there to help the families of the couple celebrate the event. Because she was there, "Jesus and his disciples had also been invited" to the gathering—included in the village's celebration. These celebrations were not like the one day event we associate with a wedding and a reception—these occasions would likely last over a week. Those opening words, "on the third day", tell us the celebration was well underway but not nearly over. It was perhaps about halfway through when social disaster happened—the wine gave out. Village celebrations were major hospitality events and the failure for those being honored to supply what was needed would bring shame to them; would be a sign that the wedding would not prosper. Jesus' mother, knowing this comes to Jesus and informs him, "They have no wine." And Jesus' first response seems rather rude and unsympathetic to the issue. "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." For some reason, John's gospel never names Jesus' mother as Mary; not here where he first uses the power he has, or at the final scene where she is at the foot of his cross when the full meaning of that hour for which he came is displayed. Here Jesus and his mother seem to have a different sense of timing about what time it is; the time when Jesus will begin his mission. Jesus' mother responds not with words to Jesus' words denying it is time for his ministry to begin. Instead she ignores his words and responds with action setting into motion the event John describes as the first sign of who Jesus is. She gives the servants an assignment: "Do whatever he tells you." The narrative then describes details of what Jesus does so it becomes clear what an extravagant response Jesus will make. There were six stone jars present which were normally used in Jewish purification rites. Each would have held twenty or thirty gallons of water. Jesus' instruction to the servants was simple: fill the jars with water. Jesus doesn't touch them or say anything else. Jesus just told them to fill the jars with water and they filled them to the brim. Once that was done, Jesus said to them: "Now draw some out,

and take it to the chief steward.” Again, they did what they were told. The chief steward takes the sample. When he tastes it, he tastes wine and goes to the bridegroom with amazement saying “everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” As we read this account which John tells us is a “sign” of just who Jesus is, we need to notice that it is “performed” in completely natural, normal actions once Jesus has given that first instruction. Only the servants who filled the jars know water was placed in them; neither the steward nor the bridegroom is aware of the source of this wine. But the sign occurs at Jesus’ direction—as ordinary people do their ordinary things while following Jesus’ commands. Nothing “magic” is said or done by Jesus. The sign is performed in plain sight but it is totally unobserved: Jars are filled with water, a sample is drawn out and when tasted is found to be wine, and judged an excellent wine at that. Because this is a sign and not a miracle, the point is not, “Wow! How did that happen?” Which is what modern folks try to do as they seek to explain or analyze. The point is instead, “Wow! Who did that?” John’s narration verse 11 tells us who did it, and why: “Jesus did this the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.” This is actually a rather boring “miracle” as only the servants who followed his instructions and his disciples who were with him knew that anything at all had occurred. As in the description of Jesus’ baptism in Luke’s text last week Jesus is going about his business among people without much show and circumstance. He is among the crowd who is waiting at the Jordan and then is baptized. Jesus does not do these things to put on a show; he has no need for credit. What is revealed as “his glory” is that Jesus is a God of lavish liberality, generosity and extravagance is what he provides. He calls us from emptiness to excess, from the least to the best. This theme of celebrating God’s extravagant excess is a prominent one in scripture. This event highlights something about both Jesus and his mother. Jesus has begun selecting disciples to teach as a beginning for his ministry after his baptism, but does not seem to be ready to use his powers; saying it isn’t time yet. Jesus’ mother seems to have a different view. She is more attuned to the situation happening at the wedding and what a disaster the lack of wine would be. The wine isn’t just a social lubricant; it’s a sign of the harvest, of God’s abundance, of joy and gladness and hospitality, a blessing on the wedding couple and their future life. When Jesus speak of his hour, which has not yet come, he is speaking about the time when God will reveal his glory through the cross, resurrection and ascension, the time when God will be accessible to all, once and for all—Kairos time. But Jesus’ mother seems to have a different sense of the time—it is the third day of the wedding when this disaster occurs. Reminding us that it was the third day when Jesus was raised from the dead. God’s will and purpose in sending Jesus was a response to our need for a path to be reconciled to God. Jesus’ whole life is in response to human need. So here in the first sign that John describes we can see that wherever there is need and Jesus is on the scene, Jesus will respond to the need; abundance and wholeness are right around the corner. This oddly timed sign revealed something about Jesus. When he is on the scene, anything is possible. Because as John proclaimed in the first verses of this gospel, Jesus reveals in his own person God’s grace upon grace. Jesus’ presence makes God accessible and available to us all. What does John’s gospel show us about Jesus through this sign? The word “grace” appears on four times in John’s gospel and only in the prologue. Jesus’ signs are to show you, not tell you, but show you what

abundant grace is. What does abundant grace taste like? Like the very best wine when you are expected the cheap stuff. The signs show not only God is responsive to people's needs, but the quality of the wine shows symbolically the quality of God's grace—beyond expectations. Jesus may not want to be involved but he is not aloof to the human situation. That this wine is better than anything served before illustrates that Jesus' is the apex of God's glory—In God's own timing the Messiah has come to intervene. Even if he is inconvenienced by the request, his heart is larger than the stone jars. And this sign also shows God does not need to take out an ad in the paper to do the work needed. Our good works are by-products of faith. Faith is not a matter of coercion but of wonder at the miracle of Christ and God's love. Not only did God's answer to human needs arrive in unexpected form, an infant born to peasants, he appeared in a small insignificant village and the first time he responded to the needs of people was in the small Galilean village of Cana with no fanfare. Most of the later actions of Jesus termed as miracles were done in response to desperate situations; they are done to relieve suffering, they are done to restore health and wholeness. Yet this also was an extravagant action which points to something beyond the fine wine. As a sign it points us to the source of all life and joy. The image of a banquet is used frequently in scripture as a picture of restoration and wholeness, of the joy associated with redemption. The 8th century prophets often drew this picture to provide the people with hope for the future. Later Jesus will declare about his mission "I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly." Abundant life is more than mere existence or survival, and certainly more than an abundance of material things. Abundant life is to know and be known by the One whom all life came into being. It is to have an intimate relationship with the One who loves us so much that he cannot stop giving. That is illustrated in the giving done even when the hour is not right. Abundant life means that in Christ we are joined to the source of true life, life that is rich and full and eternal, life that neither sorrow, nor suffering, nor even death itself can destroy. For John's writer the purpose of this sign was accomplished according to the final verse about this sign: "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and the disciples believed in him." The better translation of the Greek is that the disciples believed into him. Few saw or knew what had happened, but because of this "sign", the disciples whom he had called believed. In God's time that is the crucial moment—when disciples believe and experience God's grace. In God's time the timing of the hour happens to us all, the hour when we come to experience and believe in God's love and grace in spite of the chronos time flowing around us. Discipleship to our Lord is a matter of learning to tell time according to Kairos time—learning to see God's presence and movement in our lives and time. Learning how to use the spiritual gifts Paul describes in the 1st Corinthians passage in the manner God intends. Learning to tell time in this faithful way is a continual process, not a quick thing. But leaning to tell time according to our Lord's ways does lead to life abundant. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

