

EPIPHANY 2C 2025
Immanuel Highlands Episcopal Church
Wilmington, Delaware
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There are some comforting words in today's Gospel lesson. There is what John calls Jesus' first miracle, the changing of water into wine at a wedding in Cana. Then there are the reactions of the surprised stewards, guests, and even the host of the party. But there's one more. It's kind of nice to know that even Jesus had an "Oh, Mom" moment.

And, of course, there's more to the story than simply changing water into wine and hoping that Jesus shows up at your next soiree. John is a gospel full of symbols, and has been called the "Gospel of Light." He isn't interested so much in the events of Jesus' life as he is to shed light on what Jesus' life means to the world, and his life is from before the world came into being until long after the world as we know it comes to an end.

The earliest Hebrew prophet, Amos, speaks of life when God is fully present. One of his signs is that there will be like having an abundance of good wine for celebrating the life shared together with God at that time. At Cana, water jars that contain anywhere from 20 to 30 gallons each are filled with the best wine they have ever tasted. If you're having flashbacks to college parties, we'll find a quiet spot for confession. Also, remember that these are stone jars, hewn from granite or marble or the like, not formed by human hands from clay, which means the jars themselves did not require purification.

Okay. Before we get side-tracked by a hermeneutical sommelier, let me reiterate John's use of symbols. He tells us of an almost insane abundance of wine, yes, but he's not really talking about wine any more than he's wanting to talk about the benefits of marriage here. So I'm going to need to serve some strong coffee by way of interpretation.

One important aspect of stories of Jesus' miraculous healing and feeding is to get our attention focused on a hoped-for reality. Scholars call it eschatology, which means it's about a time to come when we are fully present with God through the saving work of Jesus of Nazareth. In his human life, Jesus showed those around him what life is like when God is fully present. And to be fully present in first-century Palestine, that meant taking on human form, or, as John tells it, "becoming flesh." I'll point you to the prologue of his gospel for further edification.

Paul tells the church in Corinth that they are the Body of Christ—together and not individually. They each have "spiritual gifts" that work together for the good of the whole body, the community of believers. And they exist in the world to share the abundance of life they find in Christ Jesus, a life that reaches into the dark places of

their world to shed a gospel of light, of good news, that offers the wine of redemption in all its extravagant possibilities. They are, to use Amos's words, to be like wine running down the hillsides as a sign of God's redemption. Each gift, like the miracles of Jesus, reveals God's presence in the ordinary events of life. They are best witnessed without forward planning or attention to detail. That's how God works, using the ordinary in order to achieve the extraordinary.

One of my favorite movies is one entitled *Babette's Feast*. A refugee from Paris, also a renowned chef, finds herself in the employ of an austere family whose much revered father was a very strict and, shall we say, frugal, pastor. The chef, Babette, wins a lottery, and decides to spend it all on a lavish feast for her hosts and their guest. She buys food, china, silver, crystal, and expensive wines for the one-time event, spending about 25,000 francs.

The family, not wanting to insult their chef, is torn over whether to accept the gift, and if accepted, whether to show any sign of possible enjoyment of it. Their usual demeanor is one that seems to say the eleventh commandment is "Thou shalt not smile." Their expressions during the meal are a wonderful part of the movie, and to their surprise, their guest, who is a well-travelled military man, recognizes one rare dish that was prepared only in one exclusive restaurant in Paris by their renowned chef.

Finally, the feast is done, and a brother in the family begins to make his way home while under the "inspiration" of an abundance of good food and wine. He wanders into the street, pretty much feeling neither pain nor remorse, and finds he can no longer contain his joy. But, even while remembering his upbringing, a silly grin overtakes his face and he looks to the stars and whispers, "Alleluia!"

I wonder if we're much like that family when we consider our own spiritual gifts, thinking that they're not important, or even necessary or desirable to others. Along with that, I wonder whether they'll be accepted as some of the "really good stuff" ordinarily set aside for special occasions.

So consider that our spiritual gifts, and our use of them, are not to draw attention to ourselves, but to reveal that in some way God is again present in God's creation. Maybe not in God's fullness as it was in Cana that day, but in a way that God is made known. It could surprise all of us, even as a friend's family was surprised when I showed up at his father's wake wearing a clerical collar. They didn't even bother to ask how we knew each other, as they were so surprised that my friend knew a priest. Or maybe it was that a priest would admit that friendship in public. Go figure.

The wine of abundant life is waiting for us to take a sip, and to offer it to others. Our task is to try to empty the jar that never runs dry.