

“Getting Comfortable with the Uncomfortable”

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First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

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I Corinthians 12:1-12

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.

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 of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, ‘Fill the jars with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, ‘Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.’ So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, ‘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.’ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Let us pray. Gracious God, you offer us your living Word. And through these words your Spirit moves among us, encouraging and challenging, opening our hearts and our minds. So continue to be with us now as we consider your Word for us this day. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

So this morning's reading is about the wedding at Cana, and it's a story that we only find in the Gospel of John. Many people focus on the miracle part of it, but I think there's something else going on beneath the surface. The scene itself is this-- Jesus and his disciples, his mother, and many others are gathered at a wedding and it's the third day of the celebration. And it appears that the wedding planner has not done his or her job because they've run out of wine and that is a big issue. It's a hospitality breach. One scholar wrote, "Now if it were us, we might whisper nervously to some friends to make a run to the local wine shop and pick up some more." And of course, we'll pay you back. "But in this time and place, running out of wine is not just a little embarrassing, it's a sign of a faux pas. When they run short on wine, they run short on blessing. And timing is everything. The wine has run out before the wedding has and it's a catastrophe. Now to make matters worse, Jesus' mother doesn't seem to have a real good sense of timing either. Because when she turns to him and says they have no wine, we don't quite know whether it's because she's close to the families of the bride or whether she was just really concerned about this faux pas."¹

"But what we do know is that she expected her Son to do something about it. But Jesus responds in kind of an odd way. He seems to act as though this is a matter of bad timing, too. "Woman." An oddly formal tone for His mother. "Woman, what concern is it to you? Or to me? My hour, my time has not yet come."² I don't know about you, but sometimes this is one of those passages that makes you scratch your head. What was this exchange between mother and son all about? Yes, there's a hospitality problem and she wants him to fix it. But there's more than that. Consider Mary's role here. She seems to appear in very significant moments. We know that Matthew and Luke contain a lot about Mary in talking about the birth of Jesus. Yet if we look closer, we know that she is aware that something else is going on here. Mary appears with the

angel when she tells him she is to bear the Son of God. She appears in the Gospel of Matthew when Joseph considers divorcing her and then changes his mind. She ponders the words of the shepherds and the wise men. And she also talks about him and hears about him from Simeon and Anna. Years later when they lose Jesus going home from Jerusalem and they go back and find him at the temple, she gives him the what for.

There are these little moments where she appears that are significant in the life of Jesus. Now when she calls him out on getting more wine, he testily answers with that obtuse response, "It's not my problem. It's not the right time." Now if we were thinking that he was younger we might say He would roll his eyes like a teenager and look at his mother that way. But this is decades later. Jesus is now in His 30s. But maybe that's the point. Maybe it is time. Maybe Mary's not being a helicopter parent, but someone who knows when it's time for Jesus to step out and fulfill what he came for. After all, Mary knew from the moment that the angel talked to her that her son was not only going to belong to her but the whole world. "Mary recognized that whenever her son was on the scene it was not an ordinary time."³ Or perhaps it's more like the expression from where I grew up on the East coast. "A mother knows," and she knew this was the time.

Now what's fascinating to me is that the focus of this passage is often on the miracle. The how's. How could it have happened? But is that really the point? Maybe it's not about the miracle itself, but the issue it represents. Marking the beginning of Jesus's ministry. Consider the Gospels and how they open. Matthew and Luke focus on the birth and then, suddenly, in just a matter of a few verses we go from him being a young person to the preaching of John the Baptist, and the baptism of Jesus, and the arrest of John. In Luke, we go from the incident at the temple when he's about 12 years old to the baptism. And then it says, "Jesus was 30 years old when He began His work."

So in these Gospel readings after the birth narrative, it's as if Jesus disappears from view. We don't read about him again until he's an adult. There are a lot of theories about this and what happened during those years. Some theorize he went to Britain or India or Tibet. Some theorized he learned all about meditation techniques. We really don't know. What we do know is that he disappears for years and suddenly he returns and his ministry begins in earnest.

Consider the Gospel we read this morning from John. Those mysterious words, "In the beginning was the word and the word was God. And the word was with God. In the beginning, He was with God." These mysterious words come into the scripture of John and then suddenly we turn to John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus, and the arrest of John. And then in chapter 2 we arrive at the wedding. I think the wedding event is one that tells us change is coming. A new movement is at hand and it's Mary who helps Him launch it. Today's passage then is about the beginning of change for Jesus and the way in which he acts in the world.

So maybe it's good to consider how Jesus reacted at first. He seems to be hesitant or resistant. But maybe that tells us to think about what happens when we are presented with change. In the beginning of a new year, we often think about new things. But it's not always easy. When someone asks us to do something new and different some of us we hesitate. Why is that? Sometimes there are valid reasons. We really do need to take more time for our family or focus on a major program at work. But maybe it's a reluctance to put ourselves out there for the kingdom. Maybe it's anxiety or a fear of failure. So perhaps this passage is a reminder to us that we all have gifts to share and we need to get over our anxiety and share them.

Paul's words in Corinthians do talk about gifts and following a call. Now the situation in Corinth is a little bit different. There are divisions occurring among the people. Imagine that. And the issue at hand is that speaking in tongues, or *glossolalia*, is considered by some, especially those who have it, as the truest mark of faith and better than the others. They are being challenged though to realize that all gifts matter, that everyone has something to give and to offer. Paul is reminding them that everybody has a gift and there is no hierarchy. Some people are better at finances in the life of the church, and some people are better at doing visitation in the hospital. Some people teach Sunday school beautifully, and some people can sing well, and some of us should just listen. There are a lot of gifts we have to share and Paul is saying that all gifts are necessary and contribute to the body of Christ.

The other thing that's powerful about Paul's words is I think he expands the understanding of what it means to live out faith, that you don't have to be part of the hierarchy to have an important gift, that the laity have to share as well. That the Spirit inspires us and leads us to share these gifts for the common good. I think sharing gifts is important outside of the life of the church as well. I give thanks to God for those who like to cook and work at restaurants because there are times when I want someone to wait on me. I think with gratitude about those people who took my children at camp and loved

them. Or in the medical field, I have a friend who is an OR tech nurse and she's fascinated by all the things they do to replace bones and joints and all kind of things and she wants to share it with me. I'm kind of like Doc Martin [laughter]. I don't want to talk about it, but I'm so glad she does it.

Sometimes we use the excuse of age or a disability to keep us from doing something. I find myself thinking, "What would the world be like if people all felt that way?" Like Grandma or Anna Moses, the famous painter. She grew up on a farm. After she married, she and her husband had their own farm and they raised five children. She had done some painting here and there, but it wasn't until after her husband died that she took up painting as a way to deal with her grief. So it was in her 70's that she began painting in earnest and in those years she created over 1,500 paintings and lived to be 101. She created images of American rural and farm life and folk art in ways that have really touched a lot of our lives. Then I thought of the Griffin twins, one named Shaquille and the other Shaquem, one with two hands, the other with one. Both of them have incredible talent for football, but many people assumed that because one of them had one less hand, he couldn't play as well. The football world has learned that this is not the case. So consider, what if his father had never encouraged his gift in spite of all the odds? What if he was unwilling to try? I know his story inspires many of us, and it does me.

So think about the wedding where Mary makes her move and encourages Jesus. He seems to pull back for a moment, a normal human reluctance to take a leap and begin something new. Maybe that helps us relate more to Jesus because for some of us, it is hard to take that leap. We're afraid of failure or making a commitment or afraid of not fulfilling the expectations of others. When we do this, we forget that God promises that the Spirit will be with us in all times and in all places, familiar and unfamiliar. We don't go it alone. Paul reminds us the Spirit speaks to us and we should discern that, to be willing to open ourselves up to serve in new ways. And it's not only in the serving that we are enriched. Our lives are enriched as well. Consider that Jesus did hesitate, but then he launched into his ministry wholeheartedly. He shared his gifts. He preached the good news. He healed those who were hurting and ill and struggling. And I think, in part, the reason he was able to do that and others received him so well is that he was human too. He knew how risky it could be to launch into this vision of faith, and he knew that other people needed to feel that good news. So He reaches out to the woman at the well and tells the parable of the prodigal son including the angry older brother. He challenges Peter when Peter gets upset when Jesus tells them that he would be leaving them and they would have to carry on.

Sharing our gifts is important, important for the good of the Kingdom and also for ourselves. I remember in December reading some articles from studies at the University of Chicago and Northwestern and other places, and the studies showed that the act of giving made people feel happier for a longer period of time than not giving, that taking the opportunity to be generous feeds our souls "and strengthens our sense of connection and belonging to the community."⁴ It gives us a deeper sense of meaning and purpose. And it's not only about giving money or things but also of ourselves. Volunteering offers us ways "to learn and grow and connect and that it can enhance our life's sense of satisfaction and our happiness. It gets us out of our comfort zone. It helps us gain confidence and offers us a sense of achievement."⁵ Indeed, in a play on the words that the Lord loves a cheerful giver, it appears that giving can make us feel more cheerful.

Jesus moved from reluctance to service, from waiting to action, from obscurity to willingly becoming known. He went from his baptism to calling disciples and commissioning them. And they, in turn, commissioned others. Through them and those who followed, Jesus invites us to do the same not only for the good of the kingdom but for each of us as individual children of God. We all have gifts to share, and when we do that, we offer signs of God's love to others. And in turn I think it helps us believe in God's love for ourselves more deeply as well, giving us a deeper sense of joy and of peace. Amen.

1, 2 & 3 "Learning to Tell Time" by David Lose, in *Dear Working Preacher Sunday*, January 13, 2013 from Textweek.com

4 "Why giving gifts brings you more happiness than receiving them." Paul Taner December 25, 2018 from the Big Think

5 "9 Reasons Why Volunteering Makes You Happier and Healthier" by Eric Engelbart, May 18, 2018 from the Learn.localgood.org.