

The First Reading of Scripture is Isaiah 62:1-5:

¹ For Zion's sake ***I will not keep silent,***
and for Jerusalem's sake ***I will not rest,***
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.
² The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.
³ You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
⁴ You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land Married;
for the LORD delights in you,
and your land shall be married.
⁵ For as a young man marries a young woman,
so shall your builder marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.

The Second Reading is from John 2:1-11:

¹ On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.
² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to Jesus, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ ***His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."*** ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So, they took it. ⁹ 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 ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ ***Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory;*** and his disciples believed in him.

The Message is entitled, "Reluctant Generosity"

When I was a volunteer police chaplain, it was never easy to be called out because it meant that someone had died. It meant that I would be thrust into the raw pain of death, whether the context was natural or self-inflicted, whether the deceased was old or young. I knew that the raw pain of those impacted would be palpable, so it never got any easier. Yet, being present for and with others in times such as these is the gospel at work.

Part of the power of our Scriptures that forms our faith is the good news it has to offer people who desperately need to hear such good news, even while being able to name the reality of the present situation. Thankfully, our scriptures do not sugar coat life. They are brutally honest. The reality is that life is often not as we would want it, nor is it as God wants it.

Isaiah calls out to God in our text saying, “Regarding Zion, God, I can’t keep my mouth shut; regarding Jerusalem, I can’t hold my tongue. Until... until her righteousness blazes down like the sun and her salvation flames up like a torch.” Isaiah is addressing a people who had been full of hope at their return from their Babylonian exile, yet now they are battling deteriorating morale caused by broken dreams and crumbling faith. The exile is over, yet their beloved Jerusalem and the temple still lies in ruins. Isaiah wonders out loud with the people, “Is God indifferent to our plight?”

I appreciate this brutal honesty and I absolutely give thanks that our scriptures record the reality of life as it is with all its sorrow, horror, disappointment, disillusion, and doubts as well as its joys. Isaiah is praying his heart out in this chapter saying, “I’m going to give you no peace God, until you make Jerusalem your delight; until you make her famous as a City of Praise.”

“I’m going to give you no peace, God, until...” How would you complete this prayer for your own life, for our church, for our nation or for our world? Will you give God no peace until all people know that they are precious and beloved? Will you give God no peace until the government shutdown ends and civility is brought back into our political and public discourse? Will you give God no peace until all nations stop warring, until all violence is ended, until health and wholeness, happiness and deep joy is experienced by the whole human race? How would you complete this sentence, “I’m going to give you no peace, God until...?”

When tragedy invades our lives there is a tendency in all of us to hunker down and say that the world out there is just too much for us to handle. There is a tendency to ask circular questions of why, which usually are never answered. There is also a tendency to wonder if we really can make a difference in people’s lives. We easily slip into the abyss of there is just too much wrong in this world, so I’m just going to take care of myself and admit there is nothing I can do to change things. This is natural, because it brings back a sense of control for us in a world seemingly gone mad. This is why Isaiah cries out, because the people of God are wondering if God is powerless to stop the madness.

I know I have had that thought on occasion, when I witness folks huddled in corners to stay warm because life circumstances or self-induced hardship have robbed them of a place to call home. When I see rows of buildings standing abandoned and empty, devoid of meaningful commerce or even any signs of life. When I see freeway and street signs littered with graffiti I wonder how am I supposed to stop this. I wonder what difference all the churches here in Redlands or in all our cities – do we make a difference? Are we powerless to address the harsh realities we might experience in our daily walks through life? Or is God powerless to push back the darkness, too?

This is when I hear the words of Mary to Jesus, “They have no wine.” She doesn’t ignore the reality of what she sees. She clearly states the problem, “They have no wine,” and then challenges someone to do something about it. She challenges her own son step up and step in to resolve this pending crisis.

The crisis occurs on the third day of a seven-day wedding celebration in Cana. There is no more wine. Now this seems rather trivial in my book... considering the problems of the world

around us, yet Mary's compassion is for the family that shoulders the responsibility of hospitality. She doesn't want this couple's wedding to be remembered for what they ran out of! So, Mary turns to Jesus, knowing that he can do something about the pending crisis of hospitality. Yet, Jesus is not ready to act.

In my book, Jesus sounds rather disrespectful when he responds to his own mom saying, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? It's apparent from his response that Jesus believes that this is not their problem. They are simply invited guests to this celebration. It's the bridegroom's and his family's responsibility not his mom's or his. Yet, Mary sees the crisis about to happen and she compassionately responds by acting.

What I love about Mary is that she is not offended by her son's response. She also doesn't take his abrupt no as the final answer. She simply looks to the servants, with Jesus within earshot and says, "Do whatever he tells you." I imagine she then walks away leaving Jesus standing in air thick enough to cut, as the servants wait in strained silence for Jesus to act.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus, who had the power to act, at first holds back? Why is he reluctant to solve this trivial problem given his abilities? What does Jesus mean by his words, "My hour has not yet come?"

I wonder if this is sometimes our first response to the pressing needs of our world. Sorry, it's not my time. This pressing need doesn't concern me! Somebody else is responsible, so it's not my problem. This divine reluctance is scandalous for sure, but this is exactly why Isaiah says he is not going to give God any peace until Jerusalem is God's glorious crown. Isaiah demands that God act and that God acts now, not later!

Of course, in the gospel text Jesus does act. His reluctant generosity becomes extravagance grace, as large vats of ceremonial water are turned into the finest wine. What seems trivial compared the real issues of the day is worth a miracle though. This water into wine manifests the glory of God - for God wants a community of faith to be a place of celebration, as well as a place of solace and sustenance.

So, how are we to interpret these texts when life is pressing in or the world seems to be falling apart? Could it be that we are to be like Isaiah and Mary, beseeching God and demanding God to act now? Or could it be that we are to be like Jesus, manifesting the glory of God by the power of the Spirit at work through our actions? I don't believe our interpretation should be an either or. I believe it should be a both and.

We must never stop asking for God to set right what is not.

I don't know if you have heard, but our city has closed the cold weather shelter at the Set Free Church. They closed it Thursday morning, so on that cold and rainy night when we were all snuggled warmly in our houses, 30 individuals who had made their way to the shelter were left outside without shelter. Now, I am sure the city had its reasons, but what are we to do?

How are we to beseech God to help this city find a solution to the lack of housing during the cold weather months. With the closure of the Salvation Army last year, this city had no housing last winter and we may not have any again this winter. There is nowhere for individuals struggling with homelessness to get out of the cold.

I tell you from my five years of experience in Garden Grove working with this population, I used to say to our clients that they were far tougher than I am, as I wouldn't make it on the streets in cold wet weather. Neither did Sunshine, for she laid down one evening on bitter cold cement which caused hypothermia and her death. Sunshine was her own worst enemy for she

was inebriated that night, but does it absolve us of seeking solutions for those who are struggling like her? How might we beseech God to help not just our city, but all cities struggling with the growing homeless population, so that we might find solutions that value each person as one of God's precious sons or daughters, even if they don't know how to claim their value?

A recent episode of *New Amsterdam*, a medical drama, attempted a creative solution for an individual on the streets who was a frequent flyer in their ER. In the past year, he had cost the hospital over a million dollars in ER services. So, the creative solution was to house him in an apartment – cheaper than a million dollars per year said Dr. Max Goodman, the Medical Director. He continually challenges his staff saying, "We don't settle at New Amsterdam... we think outside the box." Yet, the frequent flyer shows up again in the ER in need of some help. What happens though is out of the box. He is observed giving perfect directions to a client trying to get to a particular department in the hospital. His knowledge of the hospital complex was amazing, so another out of the box idea was birthed and the frequent flyer was offered a job as a hospital concierge! Do you know that there are cities that are putting some of their respective homeless population to work? This started in Albuquerque, New Mexico, but others cities have learned from Albuquerque – Denver, San Jose, Fort Worth, and San Diego to name a few. And these programs are saving money, while helping lives be redirected in meaningful ways.

Addressing homelessness may not be where God is calling you to serve, but I am certain that God is calling you to manifest the glory of God through your very life in some small or large way. The challenge is discerning your call. Well, Frederick Buechner has a suggestion for he writes in his book entitled, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

Is your deep gladness children thriving at school? Is your deep gladness participating or supporting the arts for underprivileged children or youth? Is your deep gladness fixing mechanical problems? Is your deep gladness the natural world? Is your deep gladness working with differently abled children, youth or adults? Is your deep gladness praying for those who hunger or thirst for healing and wholeness? Is your deep gladness teaching, or serving, or you fill in the blank? Your deep gladness is a way to manifest the glory of God through your life to address a deep hunger in this world.

Could it be that Mary is simply saying to us today, as she said to her son, manifest the glory of God that is within you, not reluctantly, but generously.

For you see, this being Christian is not a spectator sport, for as Teresa of Avila says, "Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion looks out on the world, yours are the feet with which Christ is to go about doing good and yours are the hands which Christ uses to bless others."

Reluctance is not an option. Let's be generous and manifest the glory of God through our very lives. Amen.