

Sunday 20th January 2019 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		Epiphany 2 – Year C
Isaiah 62:1-5	Ps 36:5-10	1 Cor 12:1-11
		John 2:1-11
THE GIFT OF NEW WINE		

“His mother [Mary] said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ ”
(Jn 2:5)

EPIPHANY

We live in a world transformed by inventions or discoveries. Much of what we take for granted has been invented or discovered in the past few years: x-ray machines, electricity, computers, aeroplanes, the internet. Someone, somewhere, had an “aha!” moment, when the penny dropped, when something worked for the first time, when the first aeroplane actually flew, when the first computer did its calculations, when the first x-ray showed a broken bone inside someone’s body. We could call such discoveries “epiphany moments”, moments of sudden realisation or revelation.

The word “epiphany” is based on a Greek word which means “appearance” or “manifestation”. An “epiphany moment” is a spiritual “ah-ha” moment that changes our life, an insight that leads to our conversion; a vision, a deep inner conviction, a profound sense that God has spoken to us – and that sends us out in a radical new direction.

We are in the church season of the Epiphany – the manifestation of Christ to the gentiles as represented by the magi (the three wise men) (Matthew 2:1-12). We are given new insight or understanding into the essential nature of Jesus Christ: divine, God, to be worshipped and adored, yet born as a human being, living amongst us.

THE SCRIPTURES

The readings for the Sundays after the Epiphany give us the big picture: Christ is manifested – shown – to the magi (you and me), to humankind, to the world, to the entire creation. We are given a glimpse of the cosmic dimension of the work of Christ. We are shown something of God's intention for the whole of creation.

Isaiah 62:1-5 It is part of an extended piece of prophecy (3rd Isaiah), a time of restoration and hope for the people of God as they return from exile and begin the long process of rebuilding. Zion, Jerusalem will be beautiful again. She is the bride who had been forsaken but is now reinstated. She becomes the delight of the Lord. God is portrayed as the husband, the lover who cherishes and adores his bride, his beloved. The emphasis is on God's part in the relationship. God delights in his bride, the church. The church, the new Jerusalem, is given signs and symbols of worth, a crown of beauty, the royal diadem; a precious jewel in the sight of God; and she is given new names.

The old names were names of despair and isolation: Forsaken; Desolate. The new names are names of relationship and belonging: Hezphibah - My Delight is in her, Beulah – Married or Wedded. There is the image or metaphor of love and marriage (which goes together as a horse and carriage): “As a young man weds a maiden, so will you be wedded to him who rebuilds you, and as a bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so will your God rejoice over you.” (Is 62:5)

The contrast is between a biblical (Jewish and Christian) faith and that of the pagan Canaanite cults: God as the faithful and loving husband, who delights in his bride, in contrast with Baal as the pagan husband, who is little more than a source of fertility.

The restoration of a people is a picture of the gospel; salvation from sin and destruction; redeemed from brokenness and hopelessness; restored and set free to wholeness and new life. The life in Christ.

We see the grace and mercy and love of God for God's people, for you and me, for us as the body of Christ. It's a good place to start the year: to know that we are loved, prized, treasured, beloved of God; that there is a way forward for our renewal and our redemption.

John 2:1-11 is the well-known story of the wedding at Cana in Galilee, when Jesus turns water into wine. The scene: a wedding feast. /the community gathered. Jesus and his disciples arrive as invited guests. The wine runs out – a serious embarrassment! At first Jesus is not willing to help – “My hour has not yet come”. The mother of Jesus says to the servants at the feast, “Do whatever he tells you to do.” The water is turned into wine – the best wine, served to bring joy and delight and happiness. What a gift for any caterer!

On first glance, it seems a frivolous beginning. Wine at a wedding feast? Is that the best that Jesus can do to begin his ministry? When there is a world out there that needs him? This event is given to us as the first of the signs – there are seven of them - in John's Gospel. A sign is a moment when “the angels of God are going up and down where Jesus is” (Jn 1:51) – “moments when heaven is opened, when the transforming power of God's love bursts into the present world”(Wright, p 25): a time and moment “when heaven and earth intersect with each other”, moments when “the life of heaven” comes down to earth. It is a sign of transformation: the power of Jesus to transform and use our everyday lives, you and me; to enter situations of pain and loss and suffering, and bring change and hope.

AND SO...

We are still very much in the beginning of the year. All the hopes of 2019 are still fresh in our minds and hearts. We are on the brink of the unknown. And already the crises are upon us: the serious drought and water crisis here in town and in much of the Eastern Cape – let's do all we can to save water; service delivery protests down the road, in Bathurst; the political crisis in Zimbabwe – we pray for good governance in that country; terror attack in Nairobi – we weep with those who have lost loved ones, and we stand against all acts of

terror and violence; the anxiety and anger around alleged racism in schools – let’s be people of love and reconciliation wherever we find ourselves. A country seething. Angry. Fearful.

Our call is to look and respond with eyes and hearts of faith; to ask ourselves “what would Jesus do”; to recognise that as the church and the body of Christ we have been given the privilege, and the challenge and calling, to live here at this time and in this place. Perhaps it is as simple as hearing the words of Mary to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you to do.”

DRAFT STATEMENT OF WELCOME AND AFFIRMATION

I share with you a draft “statement of inclusivity” which PCC has been working on. The questions around human sexuality, and our holy use of this great gift from God, continue to exercise our thoughts and pastoral concern. The relationship between a man and a woman is the experience of most people, and the church continues to see faithful Christian marriage as a God-given framework for love and sexual intimacy and children. But it’s not the whole picture. Other forms of families, and relationships, are very much part of our lives – single or adoptive parents, those divorced or on their own, and people in same-sex partnerships. It is quite common, now, for people to come out as gay or lesbian; and we are aware of young people struggling with gender identity. As the Cathedral, I hope that we will be willing to welcome same-sex couples and their children; and that young people who are asking questions about gender identity and sexuality will know that there is space here for them. For us all.

CONCLUSION

Let’s be people of hope, faith and love.

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January 2019