

Sermon Epiphany 2C (and MLK) 2022

Do you recognize the initials “FHB”? In England I knew them to mean “family hold back.” It meant that there were more people round the table than the food would properly feed so the family members had to let the guests have their plates filled before they filled theirs. I remember the time Mike and I gave one of our first dinner parties not long after we were married. We invited two other couples. I was adventurous in those days and decided to cook roast duck with an orange sauce. That was fine but after Mike carved servings for our 4 guests, he realized there was very little left so I was given an “FHB” hint and so I could indicate I wanted a small portion for some made up reason. We laughed the next day. When there is not much to go around plates cannot be filled. That is the opposite of course of having an abundance which you can enjoy. We have both scenarios in our gospel today.

Jesus’ mother, Mary, seemed to be a part of the wedding family; some scholars say she was a sister of one of the parents of the bride or groom. Who knows? But she was not just a guest because she was aware of the catastrophe for the parents if there was no wine to offer. A wedding was an occasion for days of celebration which included wine being available. It was not that the whole village was to get drunk for days on end, but having sufficient wine was important as hospitality was an important feature of village life in those days. You know how frustrated you feel when you go to the store and the item you want is not available – yes you can blame covid and the supply chain – but you are annoyed. But imagine, if your family likes to serve wine and you are inviting guests to a special dinner party, finding someone has taken all the wine bottles apart from one, without telling you would be a big problem, especially if it was minutes before all the guests were due to arrive. Jesus mother was embarrassed by the situation at this wedding but seemed to know Jesus had power to change things, to work miraculous signs even if he had not at that point performed any miracles. Don’t be put off by his “Woman” as it really was a formal way of speaking. One scholar uses “gracious lady” as a good translation of “woman”. You can note that Jesus is aware he is not yet ready to start his public ministry but nevertheless he knew and it seems she knew, he could perform miracles.

But look at what he did. He involved the servants in a lot of work. He told them to fill six large water jars meaning they were to go to a well with buckets and bring back about 150 gallons of water to fill the jars. How long would it take you to walk a distance and carry back 150 gallons jugs of water? That’s a lot of work. It’s not the only time Jesus expects people to work before they receive a miraculous sign. Mary and Martha’s friends had to roll away a huge rock before Jesus called Lazarus to come out from this cave which was his grave. The disciples had to distribute food to the 5000 hungry people who were at a deserted place listening to Jesus, and they had to pick up all the leftovers afterwards. Four believers carried a paralytic man on to a house roof, dung out the roof and lowered him at Jesus feet, for healing. These are all examples of people working prior to a miracle. Jesus provided what was needed each time. But as you can see sometimes there was no miracle without the participation of the people. But look at this miracle. All the 150 gallons of water were turned into wine, very good wine. Jesus provided a huge amount of wine, an abundance of wine. He turned a scarcity into an abundance.

That is what Jesus did. Jesus can do and will do miracles, and do them abundantly. He did it in his ministry many times. You can read in the Gospels, “he healed all who came to him” as an example. He has done miracles here: we often speak of Messiahs miracles and thank God for providing them.

God will continue to provide them; this I truly believe. But you have to ask God, you need to talk to God and then of course, thank God when they arrive.

But Jesus used people to help provide the miracles, as I have just related. God has been using you and is using you and will continue to use you to provide more miracles, more Messiah miracles. What is wonderful is that God has given you the gifts you need to perform miracles. This is something for which I give thanks to God, and I hope you do too. Everyone has been given gifts, this is what you heard in the second reading today. St. Paul told the Corinthian people that "To each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good." It is a good time for you to think about how you are using the gifts you have been given for the common good of our church. You may have reached out to Messiah members who are struggling with being isolated during covid, you may have helped in our outreach Christmas program or in last summer's backpack program. You might have bought items for North porch which you so generously gave to me at Christmas, and which are now being given to needy families with babies and infants. You may be helping sort items or hang clothes or serve people in the thrift shop, you may have helped on our clean up days when we worked to keep our grounds in good order. You may be in our Sunday school teaching team, teaching our children or you may have helped with Vacation Bible Camp. You may be on our vestry helping lead us especially at this time. You may be in the Bell Choir, or you may be in an adult ed. class or Bible study learning in what ways Christians can make a difference in the world. These are just some of the many examples of how Messiah members are using their gifts to make a difference in God's world. St. Paul reminded the Corinthians that there are varieties of activities, but God activates them in everyone, in everyone, I repeat. It is so good that we are all different, that your gifts are different from each and every other person. You are unique. How wonderful is that. But unless you use the gifts you have been given, they will be missing as no one else can do those things you do in the ways you do them.

This weekend we are honoring the memory of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He was given many gifts by God and fearlessly used them. As you know he was an American Baptist minister and activist who was a leader in the Civil Rights Movement. He is best known for his role in the advancement of civil rights using nonviolent civil disobedience based on his Christian beliefs. On October 14, 1964, King received the Nobel Peace Prize for combating racial inequality through nonviolent resistance. He was given many gifts, gifts of leadership, gifts of oratory, gifts as a pastor, but it needed a major decision on his part and a willingness to keep working that made the difference, which enabled the civil rights movement to go forward in such a momentous way. Just as Jesus provided people with opportunities to participate with him in the work of the miracles The Rev. King was prepared to work unstintingly to bring about civil rights for African American people. You can read of his life and the many obstacles he faced as well as death threats on him and his family. Yet he continued because he believed this was what God was calling him to do. You are not him and you have different gifts. But you are also called to unstintingly use the gifts you have been given to make a difference in this world and in our nation today.

So today, you have a choice. You can think life is too difficult, there are too many challenges, and you feel you are not up to the challenges. It's a bit like saying "FHB" I feel insecure and don't want to risk doing anything. I might not be able to do it even remotely. Or you can say Jesus has provided me with an abundance of good things, all my life. I want to share them, help others, play an active role in my church and in this community. You can decide to say that and to do that. May God continue to bless you and be with you in all you do to serve him – or her! Amen

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