

Church of the Holy Cross
Second Sunday after the Epiphany
January 20, 2019
The Very Rev. Denise Trogdon

Extravagant Grace

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.

One of the great joy and privilege of being a priest is to participate in the joining of two lives in the covenant of marriage. A much anticipated day, emotions run high and things don't always go as planned. Before I was ordained I was often asked to sing at weddings and got referred to a couple who made arrangements by phone. When I arrived, I was introduced to the bride and told where to stand for the outdoor wedding. As we gathered around, the bride was escorted by a man who looked to be her grandfather. I sang my heart out to the young couple who stood along the front. While I was singing, the officiant nodded towards the old man and I wasn't sure what he was saying. When the older gentleman and young bride approached the officiant, to my horror I realized I had sung a love song to the bride and the best man! It might have been good for me to meet the bride and groom before the wedding! Nevertheless, I might have figured it out if I had paid attention to the signs.

I also officiated at a wedding where the bride got a heating grate caught in the heel of her shoe and pulled it right out of the floor. Thankfully she slipped out of her shoes to make it the rest of the way down the aisle! We all got a good laugh later! The best-laid plans don't keep our humanity from showing up, but this is where God's abundant grace is needed most. God's covenant of love holds us together—even when our world seems like it is falling apart.

This morning's gospel narrative takes place at a wedding in Cana. Now wedding feasts in Jesus' day often lasted a week. The food and wine were considered God's abundant blessing upon the family. Running short on wine might mean that they were running short on blessings. This social embarrassment hardly seemed worthy for the first miracle of Christ! Jesus was a bit annoyed with his Mother as she pointed to the need. But Jesus quietly responded with extravagant grace, filling ritual water basins with the finest wine. This was the first sign of divine action through the ministry of Jesus.

Before we become too literal however, the story points us to deeper symbols of spiritual thirst and the bankruptcy of depending on our own resources. This is one of many stories of how Jesus meets us with love when our hope has run dry, and gives us more than we can ask or imagine. God's grace is revealed in the person of Jesus, yet so often we don't recognize Jesus or understand God's timing. We see suffering and are quick to question God's care for us. But grace is often mediated through the unexpected and unlikely people in our lives. If we are paying attention, little epiphanies remind us of God's presence and care for all of humanity.

This was the message of Isaiah to his people as they returned from exile to the ruins of Jerusalem. The harsh reality of living in a desolate, plundered land left many feeling forsaken by God. Isaiah reminded them of God's promises and steadfast love for them. He claimed their covenant relationship and announced their name as God's delight. In God's time the people of Jerusalem would be redeemed and Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled.

Many generations later another prophet in his own time spoke of hope and God's abundant grace to a people mired in the darkness of discrimination and racism. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. whom we will celebrate nationally tomorrow, worked tirelessly for those who did not have a voice. His practice of non-violent resistance was grounded in the teachings of Jesus. King was a light in the darkness, a sign of God's covenantal love that would hold his people together even as their world fell apart. Many would not recognize the face of Jesus in King's actions, but his work moved the kingdom forward towards God's vision for humanity. In ways big and small the light of God's love is revealed when we take the time to notice.

So I would like to take that time with you now. Reflect for a moment with me and when you are ready I invite you to share out loud ways big or small that God's abundant grace has been made apparent to you. Like Isaiah, I want you to name it because there are people in this room right now who are discouraged or seeking or frustrated by the events around them and need the light you have been given to remember God's covenantal love.

You are all prophets of God's extravagant grace and we have been given this mission as a community to share the transforming power of God's love. As we hear in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, each of us are given different gifts to accomplish this mission, yet we are held together by the same Spirit. God's grace is surprising and rarely comes to us on our time frame. So when Mother Mary nudges you to action in ways you had not expected, pay attention and respond with the gifts you've been given. God's love is tangibly mediated through our humanity when we say yes.

In this Epiphany season, I invite you to begin a regular practice of noticing God's abundant grace in your life. Frame the experiences of your day with God's covenantal love and ask the question, how can I be light and hope to others today? As a community of faith we are strong in many ways and equipped to really make a difference for the kingdom of God in this time. What we do here is meant to be taken outside of these four walls, so that each of us can be that abundant grace in a suffering world.

I leave you know with this piece written by one of my favorite poets: Mary Oliver. Though she passed away this week, she was a prophet in her time, noticing the sacred in the ordinary and pointing us to the light we could not see.

The Summer Day

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean-

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

*into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?*