

**Homily, St. Andrew's
Epiphany 2C, Jan 17, 2016
John 2:1-11**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

I gotta say... It has been a difficult week. It ended, of course, with the sad news of Doreen's death on Friday. Earlier in the week, however, I participated in some difficult conversations in Banff with most of the clergy of the Diocese. As I mentioned last week, we gathered for a facilitated meeting to discuss same-sex blessings. There is great diversity of theology and opinion amongst the clergy of the Diocese and so probably every point on the spectrum was represented. We met in small groups and the full, large group in an effort to come to greater understanding through generously listening to one another. There were difficult moments... there were moments of tension and conflict... there were moments of great vulnerability and great efforts were made by everyone to be gracious. No decisions were made... that was never the intent of the gathering.

It was recognized in the end that we will probably never be of one mind and yet many of us came away with the hope that we may find a way to be of one heart in staying together as faithful Christians in the Anglican way. We were honest that we are divided and yet there was a determined collegiality amongst us that quite frankly didn't exist a few years ago. Many of us recognized that such a meeting would have been impossible 10 years ago, maybe even 5 years ago... and so we acknowledged the progress that has been made, along with the need to continue on a path of mutual respect while we continue the conversation. What that may or may not mean in terms of action remains to be determined but still, the determined collegiality and widespread desire to extend goodwill across theological divides seemed a hopeful sign.

We knew that the Primates of the Anglican Communion - the head bishops of the various Anglican churches around the world - were also meeting. It was Thursday, the day after our Diocesan meeting adjourned, that a statement from the Primates was leaked a day early. In the communique we learned that a majority of the Primates voted to "suspend" the Episcopal Church USA by [quote] "requiring that for a period of three years The Episcopal Church no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies, should not be appointed to or elected to an internal standing committee and that while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion, they will not take part in decision making on any issues pertaining to doctrine or polity." This action is considered a direct result, a consequence, Justin Welby described, for ECUSA's decision to change their doctrine of marriage. It matters for us here in particular because a similar motion will be presented at our General Synod this coming summer.

It is an odd statement for a number of reasons. Most notably is that the Primates meeting has no legislative power. The Anglican Communion is an association of churches who all relate to the Archbishop of Canterbury but who are independently governed. The only body that has any ability to make limited policy is the Anglican Consultative Council. It remains to be seen if that body will uphold the will of the Primates or if ECUSA will voluntarily comply or what will happen next? Regardless, it has left many... myself included... with a heavy heart. It's like being

asked to choose between loving friends and close neighbours who happen to be part of the LGBTQ community and loving and honouring our international Anglican family, particularly in Africa. It is also a very sad counterpoint to the difficult but hopeful experience just the day before. Is the outcome of this Primates meeting a sign that the Anglican Communion is fracturing? Is it a sign that we in Canada should back away from re-imagining marriage? If the events of this week are signs... what are they signs of? How are we to read the signs?

Today we hear the first “sign” Jesus performs in the Gospel according to John. Unlike the other 3 Gospels, there are no miracles in John... only signs. And unlike the others where Jesus works numerous wonders of healing and exorcisms of evil spirits, in the Gospel of John, Jesus instead performs only seven or eight wondrous deeds. Finally, in the other gospels, “Jesus is asked to perform a sign to convince doubters of his identity, and he reprimands them for the request... The interest in seeing a sign as a basis for faith is condemned as an expression of distrust and suspicion.” In John, however, the meaning of signs is quite different. The Johannine meaning of sign is as “an act of Jesus that provides the witness an opportunity for insight into Jesus’ true identity” “The signs are works of God, wonders, or expressions of the power of God that produce faith.” (Kysar, 80-1)

Today we hear the first of Jesus’ signs: Jesus and his disciples, and Jesus’ mother are at a wedding in Cana when the wine gives out. Jesus’ mother points out the problem to Jesus, who doesn’t respond with a great deal of concern, saying: “My hour has not yet come.” It is the first time Jesus has spoken of his “hour” and the phrase indicates that whatever is going on in the story, whatever the story is about, there is something other-worldly about it. Jesus’ reference to his “hour” indicates the simple passing of time, sure... but it also pushes the story into the eschatological - pointing to the end of time when Jesus’ purpose is ultimately and completely fulfilled.

The story continues with Jesus’ mother instructing the servants to do as Jesus says... and what Jesus says is to fill up the jars with water and then draw some out and take it to the chief steward. The steward is surprised to taste such good wine, commenting that “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.” The chief steward attributes this sudden appearance of good wine to the extraordinary hospitality of the groom. Such were the categories the steward understood... hospitality and generosity, scarcity and abundance. The steward naturally and rationally seeks to fit the circumstances of the event into the conventional world that he knows. It is a normal and reasonable way to approach such an unusual happening. Unusual generosity, perhaps, but nothing out of this world.

The disciples read the sign differently. We hear about it from the narrator: “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.” We are still early in the Gospel... the disciples have only just been called by Jesus to follow, to “come and see” what Jesus is up to. But somehow, unlike the chief steward, they haven’t held to natural and rational categories of what they know. Instead, the disciples allow the miracle of the wine to shatter the boundaries of their conventional world and they are “willing to entertain the possibility that this boundary breaking marks the in breaking of God.” (NIB, 540) God’s glory is revealed in the extraordinary acts of Jesus. This is a story not about the chemical make-up of water or wine. It is not about standards of hospitality or how to host a good party.

This is a story about the power of God manifest in Jesus. This is what the disciples believed. They believed that God is found in the unconventional and irrational. The disciples allowed the dissonance created by the departure from what is possible... the shattering of what makes sense... to open up new possibilities for abundance, for extravagance, for transformation.

This is what I hope for the future of both our Diocese of Calgary and the worldwide Anglican Communion... That whatever we may think of same-sex relationships, we allow the dissonance and discomfort of different experience and different theology to open up new possibilities for abundance, for extravagance, for transformation. In the wake of reaction to the Primates' statement, a friend re-posted an article from 2007, after a different time of increased tension in the Communion, as a sign of hope. It was a statement from the Anglican women delegates to the 2007 United Nations Commission on the Status of Women pledging to remain in communion with one another, as a model for reconciliation. At that time, the 80 women representing 34 countries said they "do not accept that there is any one issue of difference or contention which can, or indeed would, ever cause us to break the unity as represented by our common baptism. Neither would we ever consider severing the deep and abiding bond of affection which characterize our relationships as Anglican women."

It might make sense to choose distance from those with whom we disagree but the true sign of God's presence among us is not about what makes sense. The signs that matter most are not those that seek to convince doubters or dispel distrust. The signs that matter most are those that produce faith and overflow with goodness. May we watch for good signs... signs of God's abundant mercy and grace... signs of transformation to new life... signs that reveal to us the power of God to work wonders... signs that point to the hope that the best wine is still yet to come. And as we catch glimpses of the identity and character of God in Jesus Christ through these signs, may we too believe.