

Sermon for Epiphany 2: He'll turn your water into wine, Jan. 16, 2022

Last week we talked about baptism and how in baptism we are joined to Christ, to the Body of Christ, and how we receive the Holy Spirit. Everyone who is baptised has received the Holy Spirit. Some other people have, too, as God chooses to give the Spirit, but everyone who is baptised has received the Spirit. This is confirmed and strengthened in confirmation, in ordination, and whenever God chooses.

So what does that look like in our lives? I'm going to talk about three of the ways that the Spirit acts in our lives today. The Spirit gives us gifts, which St. Paul talks about today in Corinthians, the Spirit grows fruit within us, which we read about in Galatians, and the Spirit turns our water into wine. I kept thinking about the hymn, "The Trumpet Sounds," the verse that says, "He'll fill you up with Love Divine, he'll turn your water into wine!" That's my theme today.

St. Paul talks about the gifts of the Spirit. This list in Corinthians is not complete. It's a sample. He also talks about the gifts of the Spirit in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 and they're different lists. Here, St. Paul says that to each person is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. In Ephesians he says these gifts are given to equip the saints for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ. And in Romans he notes that we all have different gifts. So the main point here is that everyone has gifts from the Spirit and these gifts are not all the same.

Paul's talking about gifts that are given by the Spirit to every Christian to help build up the church and do the church's ministry. One of my jobs as your priest is to pay attention to what I sense your gifts might be (and for that I need to use the gift of discernment), and then help you develop those gifts and find an opportunity to use them. You might have noticed I've done quite a bit of training since I've been here. Training in pastoral ministry, training people as licensed lay ministers, and in other areas. Working to call forth people's gifts. One sad thing about Covid has been that many people have lost the opportunity to exercise some of their gifts.

The ones Paul mentions here are mostly ecstatic gifts that we tend to connect more with the Pentecostal church than with Anglicans. Though I've been part of Anglican churches where everyone prayed in tongues and sometimes someone would give an interpretation or a word of prophecy. And that's one way these things can be manifested, though most Anglican churches don't tend to do that. But I think it's broader than that.

The gift of prophecy, for example, is not so much having a spiritual vision of the future or miraculous knowledge of something, as it is about having clear vision of the present and seeing what is wrong with the way things are being done, from God's perspective. And how they could be done better, to make the world the way God wants it. Martin Luther King, Jr, was a prophet. It's an uncomfortable gift, because it entails speaking the truth to those in power, and they rarely like it. Many prophets end up the way Martin Luther King, Jr. did. But it is the Spirit's gifts that help them to see how things could be and give them the courage to speak.

The gift of healing may be the gift of laying on hands and curing people. But I think it might also be the ability to be a really good nurse or doctor. You've probably all met those people, whose very touch makes you feel better. I think that's a gift. The gift of wisdom comes sometimes with age but sometimes also from the Spirit. My brother-in-law is like that. He'll be at a meeting with a lot of people with conflicting views, arguing, and he'll listen and then when he's heard everyone he'll quietly say something, and everyone will say, "Yeah. That makes sense. Let's do that." Wisdom.

The Spirit works in many ways and you can't pin them down. One of my rules is that any idea that tends to limit the power of God, what God can do, or God's sovereignty is probably heretical and wrong. The Spirit blows where she wills. Paul says there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services but the same Lord and varieties of activities but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. A huge variety.

This means that you have spiritual gifts. Gifts given to you by the Holy Spirit, which no one else has. And it is through the Spirit that you can first identify them and then develop them and then exercise them for the benefit of God's people. They may not be big, flamboyant, stand in the limelight gifts. Or they may. But they might equally be behind the scenes helping kind of gifts. Whatever they are, you have them and throughout your life the Spirit will give them to you and help you grow and develop them and use them. The church should also help with this.

Everyone also has the fruit of the Spirit, but those are more the same in each person. St. Paul lists some of these in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, generosity and self-control. This is not an exclusive list either. These are things that grow in us, the longer we let the Spirit live in us, when we try to be faithful to God and follow Jesus. We don't start out our Christian life full of them. They grow in us. Slowly, like any fruit. These are things that all Christians grow (or should grow), though of course some we may struggle with more than others. They are the marks of holiness, which the Spirit slowly helps us grow into. We cooperate by cultivating them a bit. But mostly we just have to slowly let the Spirit grow more love and more joy and more peace and more kindness and more generosity and so on, within us.

Every now and then I amuse myself by thinking of other things that should be on that list. Courage. A good sense of humour. Have you ever noticed how truly saintly people often have a good sense of humour. Look at Archbishop Desmond Tutu. He was famous for always giggling. The Dalai Lama is another one who laughs a lot. Compassion would be another good one to add to the list. Because the more I try to follow Jesus, the more I find I can view my fellow creatures with compassion, even when they totally mess up.

And then there's the third thing: the Spirit turns our water into wine. In the story we read today in the gospel, Jesus is at a wedding and they run out of wine. This is a social disaster. Imagine hosting a party, especially a wedding with all your extended family there and all your spouse's extended family, and you run out of food or drink. So embarrassing. Jesus isn't wanting to intervene, but his Mom tells the servants to do what he says.

And they do. I'm always struck by the fact that these servants, who don't know who Jesus is or why they should do what he asks, take 6 enormous water jars and fill them to the brim. And Jesus turns the whole lot into the finest wine. So two things here. One is that whatever we contribute, whatever we offer Jesus, however much or little we offer, Jesus will transform it into something wonderful. So, better to offer a lot, filled to the brim.

And the other thing is this: Jesus takes the water that is normally used for washing things, and turns it to something splendid. Even so, Jesus takes our normal, daily, ordinary lives and turns them into something wonderful. He gives us the wine of joy as we go about our daily lives.

You have probably experienced this sort of thing before. When you're in love, eg, every little thing you do for your loved one becomes special. Everything you do together becomes a celebration. I remember when Charles and I were dating. We'd spent the afternoon sailing his tiny sailboat and we were starving and wanted to go out. As I recall, we had about \$7 and a few cents between us. We went to a tiny little hole in the wall Chinese restaurant and had beef brisket soup, and it tasted like the best food in the world, because I was with this really amazing guy I'd just started dating. I think we drank water with it, but it might as well have been the finest champagne, 'cause the evening just sparkled. Have you experienced that? Even doing dishes together becomes an event. Mind you, after you've been married a few years, you might not always feel that same sparkle. It settles down into something a little more steady and comforting most of the time.

Well, it's a bit like that with our relationship with Jesus, too. And this isn't to say we won't have hard times. Certainly everyone knows that right now. It just means that having Jesus with us transforms everything. Going out to a small restaurant with Charles and having soup for dinner because that was all we could afford didn't feel like a hardship. It felt like a celebration and an adventure.

And living through a pandemic or whatever it is life throws at us, with Jesus by our side, with the Spirit within us, means that, although we're still going through things and finding them hard, there will be moments of clarity when we feel Jesus' presence, when we find the wine of life and feel deep joy. The moment of seeing something truly beautiful in nature, eg. The moment of connection with a loved one in whatever way is possible. Like seeing the beautiful crystal of a snowflake and not just the fact that you need to shovel the driveway. This is the wine of life the Spirit gives us. In tiny sips whenever we're paying attention. The ordinary becomes extraordinary, because we share it with our beloved Lord.

When we are joined to Christ in baptism we are entering a great adventure, the adventure of walking through life with a companion. The Holy Spirit is with us after that, come what may. We are given gifts and helped to use them for God's people, we grow the fruit of holiness, and we can enjoy the wine of life every day. That's what the Holy Spirit looks like in our lives. That's the heritage we're given at baptism and will grow into all our lives. He'll fill you up with love divine, he'll turn your water into wine. Sing with thankfulness songs of pure delight. Come and revel in heaven's love and light. Take your place at the table of the king: the feast is ready to begin!