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Epiphany 2C
January 14, 2007
Isaiah 62:1-5
I Corinthians 12:1-11
John 2:1-11

There are few things as exciting as a beginning. That is why we celebrate them with such gusto.

Two weeks ago we sang and toasted the beginning of a new year. We celebrate the beginning of new adventures, new journeys. We celebrate the beginning of a new job, or a move to a city, or home. We celebrate the beginning the beginning of a new term in school, a new phase in life, a new season, a new week, a new day, a new life.

With gusto we celebrate new beginnings because they fill us with anticipation, and hope and dreams of what might be.

We celebrate new beginnings with festivities filled with wine and champagne, with songs and dances, with speeches, and toasts, with food, and with prayer. We celebrate new beginnings with deep delight, deep awe, and deep gladness.

We celebrate beginnings with gusto because we know that for all the excitement and hope that is present at beginnings, there is also danger, there is also risk, there is also potential for failure. We go all out when we celebrate new beginnings in the hope that the joy and the delight, the anticipation and the excitement with which we begin will last, will spill over, and will sustain us long after the beginnings end. We go all out in our celebrations of beginnings because we know that what is new at the beginning will soon grow old.

No celebration of a new beginning is as intense as the celebration that begins a new marriage. Every decision made; the guests to be invited, the money spent, the food and drink selected, the cars driven, the clothes to be worn, the toasts prepared, the prayers offered. Everything is discussed, debated, and choreographed down to the minute. Excitement and anticipation run high. The celebration must be magnificent. All are filled with the hope that the joy of the celebration will spill over into the years of the marriage. Those at the wedding sense however, perhaps deep under the surface of the celebration a fear. Under the surface of the magnificent celebration is the awareness of risk. There is the danger that the hopes of this new beginning will end in sadness, the dreams of this marriage might end in ashes. In this new beginning, as in all new beginnings, the possibility of failure is real.

Our Gospel this morning is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. The Gospel story that many of us know so well is filled with symbolism. John says that the changing of water into wine is the first sign that Jesus performed. John's Gospel is filled with signs. And when John speaks of signs, he invites his readers and listeners to look beneath the surface of the sign to discover a deeper meaning. The signs and the deeper meanings fill the readings. Perhaps the first sign is that the first miracle of Jesus ministry is at a wedding. There are also many signs that connect this first manifestation of Jesus Glory, to the full manifestation of his Glory that will come on the cross. Mary is present at Cana, and the

cross. She is the only person present at this first sign and the last. She is present in John's Gospel only at Cana and Calvary. There is wine at the beginning and at the end, choice wine at the beginning; cheap, vinegar at the end. There is water in the jars of purification at the beginning. Water flowing from the side of Jesus at the end. At both Cana and Calvary Jesus speaks about his hour.

The wedding at Cana is filled with signs for us who listen and read that story to ponder. Among the signs I have pondered this week is the fact that nowhere is the name of the bride and groom mentioned. It is just a wedding in Cana. I wonder why. Perhaps, I wonder, does John want us to realize that this wedding is not simply a wedding of a man and a woman rather it is the wedding of God and God's beloved creation. We have heard through the Hebrew Scriptures, poets and prophets speak of the marriage of God and his bride, Israel. We have heard John proclaim that in Jesus, God became flesh and dwelt among us, God became flesh and moved in with his beloved. Perhaps the wedding John is recounting is in fact this wedding of God and his beloved bride. God and her beloved groom. God and Israel. God and all humanity. God and all creation. I wonder.

This is the hope, this is the excitement, this is the celebration that John begins his Gospel with. The marriage of God and creation. There is hope present. There is anticipation. There is risk. There is danger. There is every possibility that this marriage will end badly. In fact, all indications are that it will. God's people have proved faithless for ever. God's people have been adulterous from the beginning. God's people have always forsaken God and gone off in search of other lovers.

Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps that is what John is symbolizing with the wine running out. The old wine cannot sustain this relationship. Indeed, there is not enough wine to last even until the end of the reception. If the wine runs out before the party even ends, if the hope runs out even before the party ends, how quickly will the joy run out of the marriage between God and her beloved.

Jesus offers the choice wine. The wine that will last, the wine that never runs out. Jesus makes sure that the celebration and the feast will continue. That is what he has come to do. To make sure that the feast will continue through all time.

My friends, that feast continues even to our day. At the end of John's Gospel, after Jesus has died on the cross. The soldier comes and pierces his side with a spear. Strangely, again symbolically, John states that out of his side flows blood and water. The wine that was present in the first sign, at the first hour, when Jesus first manifested his glory is now replaced by his blood. The wine shared at that first celebration has been replaced by the blood which flowed from his side. This feast continues even today. This is the celebration that we are part of when we gather this morning. We share the wine of Cana. We share the wine that is the very life and blood of Jesus. The wedding of God and creation continues. The hope, the excitement and the joy of the beginning of the marriage spills over and lasts even to today.

The wedding feast comes with an invitation.

The wedding of God and creation is not just a wedding of God and you and me. It is not just a wedding of God and the people of St. Andrew's, it is not just between God our country, God and the Church. God so loved the world. God so loved the cosmos that he came to move in with us, that she pitched her tent among us. God so loved the world that she married us. God so loved the world that he died for us. There is enough wine for all the world, for all creation to take part in the marriage with God. Many in the world still

believe that their name is forsaken, that their name is desolate. We who are disciples of Jesus are invited to let the world know that all of us are the delight of God, all of us are the beloved of God.

We are called as well to remember that like God's people through time, we often proved faithless and adulterous. We have faithlessly turned from our God of peace and lusted after gods of war. We have faithlessly turned from our God of justice and given ourselves to gods of bigotry and racism. We have faithlessly turned from our God of love and united ourselves to hate. We have turned from our God of freedom and made ourselves slaves to our passions. We have turned from our God of life and chased gods of death. The abundant wine that Jesus offers us, is not only a wine of celebration, it is also a wine of forgiveness. It is the choicest of wine for it never runs dry. It is the choicest of wines and our beloved offers it to us whenever we return to receive the love that only our God can offer us.

My friends with this wine we offer a toast.

A toast to our God who loves us.

A toast to our God who forgives us.

With the choicest of wines Jesus provides, with the choicest of wines that is the very presence of God, we delight, we give thanks and we celebrate.