

Isaiah 62:1-5

John 2:1-11

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

“Your steadfast love, O Lord,
extends to the heavens.” AMEN!

“Sign, sign, everywhere a sign.

Blockin out the scenery,
breakin my mind, do this,
don’t do that, can’t you
read the sign?”

I could not help thinking about this song by
the Five Man Electrical Band when I settled
into the readings for this morning.

And it is not because I need to
“tuck my hair up under my hat,” these days. :-)

Although I have been called
a “long haired Jesus freak.”

But, I digress...

That’s not why!

It’s because of the gospel lesson
from John today is the familiar first miracle
by Jesus in that gospel.

What we often call the miracle
“turning water into wine.”

But it is not called a miracle in
John’s gospel.

It’s called a sign.

Jesus does miraculous things in John but
the author calls them “Signs.”

“Sign, sign, everywhere a sign...”

And, what do signs do?

They tell us what to expect or alert us
things that are coming.

There’s a popular sermon story about
two men on the side of a mountain road
that held up a sign which read,

“Beware! The end is near!
Turn around before it’s too late!”

They waved the sign wildly and
jumped up and down as
vehicles quickly sped by.

No one stopped and no one turned around.

Car after car sped on by, when finally
one of the guys said to his friend,

“I think we might need to change our sign!”

They decided that a clearer message was needed
and so they changed their sign to
“Stop! Bridge out ahead!”

Finally, people paid attention to their sign. :-)

So, it begs two questions to us today.

What are we to make of this sign in John?

How do we misinterpret it?

When it comes to “firsts” this one
seems a little lackluster.

No one was healed.
No demon was exercised.

No feeding of the hungry or
raising of the dead.

It’s kind of frivolous, this sign,

when the great emergency is that
the wedding party is running out of wine.

Sorry, but if the party has to shut down early,
I don't see there's much of a danger
to anyone's health!

And why so much wine, Jesus?

The sheer excess of wine would BE
a danger to people's health!

These are just some of the things that run
through my mind when considering
the message today.

Not even mentioning how
this section of the gospel
closes for us...

“and his disciples believed in him.”

Really!? Believed what?

That he was a magician or had the power
to create great wine?

What exactly did this sign
help them to believe? (Pause)

Like so much of John's gospel and
the popular sermon story I told about
the two men on the side of the road
with the sign, we need to be clear.

Clear in understanding that John wrote
a gospel that gives us a bird's eye of God.

We need to see this sign as something great,
but also ask, "What is it that God is
revealing about God's Self to us?"

A good place to start is that this sign
comes at a wedding.

A celebration where two are united.

Where there was once separation
there is now union.

This is the fundamental purpose of a wedding!
That this first sign in John came without
a great "awe," but at a celebration
uniting a couple, the families, the friends
and the community. (Pause)

What else? What other signs in
this account reveal God?

Well, there is Mary, the mother of Jesus.

She is never referred to by name in John;
just her identity... the mother of Jesus.

What is it that she knows about Jesus
that would lead her to pull him aside?

What did she know about Jesus to say to him,
“They have no wine.”

This was Mary’s first introduction in John’s gospel...
mentioned by title and not name...
the last time she’s mentioned is at the
foot of Jesus’ cross.

We wonder what Mary knew about Jesus
and we wonder how her push here at
the wedding feast began Jesus’ walk
toward his hour of glory.

In John, when Jesus speaks of “his hour”
he means the glorification of God in
the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.

If this began Jesus walk to his hour,
did Mary see how her push at the wedding
was going to cost her everything? (Pause)

Finally, we need to wonder about this steward.

What kind of sign does he give us?

I have always sort of viewed this chief steward
to be kind of snooty.

(Talk like Thurston Howell)

“Um, yes, I’m the chief steward.”

This guy, I used to think, was so haughty
that when he tasted the wine from Jesus
he just had to pull the groom aside and
say,

“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.” (Pause)

What if I have been reading the
chief steward’s sign wrong all along?

What if he was not snotty but simply
expressing surprised delight?

Maybe he didn't mean "Hey, dummy!"

Or express those 7 dreaded words,
"We've never done it that way before!" :-)

Now, I think he was delighted and
surprised by something new.

Maybe we can be delighted and surprised
by the new things God is revealing to us, too.

"Sign, Sign, everywhere a sign..."

Beloved, this is the kind of God you have!

The One who reveals God's Self to us
in ways that are not immediately understood.

We get glimpses from time to time but
we have yet to see God's glory. (Pause)
So, I am like you.

I've been feeling grumpy and tired.

Vaccine and masks are the new abnormal. :-)

I am grouchy and exhausted in reliving
the terrible January 6th event that brought
to life the extreme partisanship of our

nation endured for 4 years of “that guy.”

I cringe when the initial reaction to January 6
had the potential to unite us but later
that very same day, new foxholes were
dug and the divide was reinforced.

We have seen the same divisions
in our American churches, too.

Christians of all shapes and stripes would
rather connect and relate with those
who agree with them politically than
to remember our union in the claim of
the same Lord and the same God.

This, of course is nothing new for Paul
who wrote to the Corinthian church to
remind them in their pursuit about being
the “most important.”

He said, “Stop!”

It is the same Spirit that gives the varieties of gifts
and the same Lord who draws us into
a variety of services.

He even mentions the three words so often
forgotten in our churches and in

our political realms, “the common good.”

Kathryn Schifferdecker wrote in her article that the “phrase [for the common good] is too often lacking in our policies and social discourse.

The pandemic is still raging in large part because some people think that their personal

“freedoms are more important than the common good.

Exhausted medical workers are once again dealing with full ICUs because there are too many people who refuse to get vaccinated; again, citing their “freedom” to do whatever they like.”

She continues, “Personal freedom, in this understanding, is utterly opposed to the common good.”

The land of the free and the home of the brave is not to be meant that individuals get to do whatever they want no matter who it hurts or who gets punished.

They don't get to do it just because they have a gun.

Freedom (the real kind that Paul wrote about)
means free in Christ, forgiven of sins and
NOT bound to any political or social ideology.

This freedom and the bravery here means
we are bound to our neighbor
in love and service, following the
example of Jesus. (Pause)

In the gospel from John, Mary said
to the servants,

“Do whatever he tells you.”

Knowing the cost of her command,
the path that it would start Jesus down,
how can we ignore it?

“Do whatever Jesus tells you.”

For once here, the disciples do
not argue or nor do they question.

They just did it.

And it doing this, they witnessed
the extravagant gift of

God's abundance. (Pause)

The last wedding reception I went to didn't
have any champagne offered at the toast
and most only give one glass, but
this wedding "sign" from Jesus
reveals to us God's abundance!

This is the kind of God you have!

We can't stay grumpy or despaired or cynical for long.

God is still active and the Spirit still gives
gifts to the people, and we are called
to the common good. (Pause)

On this weekend, as we commemorate
the work for the common good bravely done
by Martin Luther King Jr., may we

become renewed and refreshed with knowledge
that the One who will not rest nor take comfort

while injustice goes on,
lives inside of us...

is married to us...

and in you, God delights and surprises!

AMEN!