

**A sermon preached by the Rev. Jeanne Leinbach
at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Cleveland Heights, Ohio
on January 16, 2022**

Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

This morning, we relive an exchange between Jesus and his mother, Mary, which occurred at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Mary is concerned, presumably, not just for herself, but for the gathering as a whole; she is concerned that the wine is all gone. Though the tone of Jesus' response to his mother seems harsh to our 21st century ears, the message is that Jesus' time, his unveiling as the son of God, has not yet come. Yet, there is a need; and in what seems like just moments later, Jesus turns 150 gallons of water into wine. This transformation of water into wine is the first miracle that Jesus performs - the first of Jesus' signs, which always point beyond the miracle to what is-being-revealed through the miracle. Jesus is the fulfillment of our hope professed in the Old Testament.

In the Book of Amos, we hear (9:13), "The time is surely coming, says the Lord, when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it." The one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps. The term "overtake" in Hebrew is similar to "meets" or "draws near". The one who plows and the one who reaps will draw near. They will labor together and enjoy the fruits of labor together. God's justice and righteousness will prevail. The mountains dripping with sweet wine, the hills flowing with wine is symbolic of the abundance of God's salvation. When Jesus turns 150 gallons of water into wine, he is manifesting abundant salvation; he is fulfilling our hope for salvation. He is trying to help us recognize the manifestation. It is as though he is saying, "Look! Look!" He is making real for us God's

promised salvation. By suddenly turning the water into wine, relatively trivial, yet prophetic, he is responding to human need.

This focus on human need shows up in the passage from 1 Corinthians today. Paul says, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but the same God who activates all of them in everyone.” Varieties of gifts, varieties of services, varieties of activities...here is Paul’s point. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” The variety of gifts responds to the variety of our needs. In this passage of Scripture, we hear about the gifts of wisdom, faith, healing, prophecy, and discernment. Elsewhere in Scripture, we hear about the gifts of teaching, leading, and helping; we hear about generosity, compassion, and mercy; we hear about encouragement, evangelism, administration, and hospitality. Whatever our gifts, whatever our skills and abilities, our gifts are not bestowed on us because of worthiness or greatness or specialness, our gifts are for the common good, for responding to the variety of human needs.

A news story caught my eye this week, which illustrates today’s Scripture message. The Lambeth Conference is a gathering of all bishops in the Anglican Communion, from around the world. The Episcopal Church in the United States is a part of the Anglican Communion. The bishops come together about every 10 years for prayer and reflection, fellowship and dialogue on church and world affairs. The Archbishop of Canterbury convenes the gathering. At the last Lambeth Conference, in 2008, then-Archbishop Rowan Williams did not allow New Hampshire Bishop, Gene Robinson, to attend. Gene Robinson was the first openly gay and partnered bishop in the Anglican Communion. Lambeth Conference is now meeting again. Originally scheduled for 2020, the gathering was postponed until this coming summer because of the COVID

pandemic. Amid planning for this upcoming conference, news broke in 2019 that Justin Welby, the current Archbishop of Canterbury, was excluding same-sex spouses in the invitations to the bishops. Welby said that this decision was a way to accommodate the more conservative Anglican provinces, which object to The Episcopal Church's widespread acceptance of LGBTQ clergy and same-sex marriage. Our House of Bishops issued a statement saying it was "aggrieved and distressed" by Welby's decision. The decision stands in opposition to our faith, to our Baptismal Covenant to "seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as our self," to "strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being."

The news story this week that caught my eye covered a meeting between Archbishop Justin Welby and four gay and lesbian Episcopal bishops, along with two from Anglican dioceses in Canada and Wales, held in preparation for this summer's gathering. One of the participants posted a photo on Facebook of the Zoom gathering and posted this message: "On Tuesday, January 11, 2022, some of the LGBTQ Bishops within the Anglican Communion had a very Christ-centered meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Justin Welby, which was very fruitful as we make our way towards the Lambeth Conference 2022. In our meeting, we had an opportunity to hear and share stories that allow us to continue to walk in love. We are grateful to the Archbishop and his staff for their time and compassionate listening."

The decision to exclude same-sex spouses from Lambeth is distressing. Yet, there is hope. We have a long way to go in correcting the injustices in this world around sexual orientation, gender identity, race, age, religion, etc. But, hope remains when dialog remains open. Hope endures because God has promised salvation. Isaiah proclaims, "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like

the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch.” God will never leave us. God will not rest. God will continue to respond to human need until vindication shines. Let us carry this Good News in our hearts and minds, in our soul, in our bones. God is at work in our world. God gives us the skills to respond to human needs. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope.” Living with God, walking in the footsteps of Jesus, “We shall overcome.” Amen.