

Epiphany 2B - 2025  
Church of the Messiah  
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*Note: These are preaching notes and not a full written manuscript.*

*How priceless is your love, O God.  
For with you is the well of life. Amen.*

I have admitted from time to time that it feels harder to parent my adult children than it ever did when they were little. Partially because the stakes are higher... and to be honest, I have less power and influence over their lives now. I imagine Mary felt a similar way in the Gospel this morning. I am not sure why John doesn't call Mary by her name but today we see Mary in the midst of what we know as Jesus' first public act in John. The Wedding at Cana.

Mary and Jesus were guests just like everyone else. Jesus was not the host nor was he known across the land in a widespread way to be Jesus the Son of God (yet). It was a wedding of family and friends, not followers. Jesus' mother draws attention to the fact that the wine is running low. In first-century culture, weddings were often week-long events, and running out of wine that early into the festivities would be considered a social faux pas.

How does Jesus respond? Essentially, "This is not my problem." In my mama heart, I think to myself, "Hey, Jesus, don't talk to your mother like that!" It can be hard to take off our modern lens when we engage scripture.

The commentaries all suggest it wasn't intended as disrespect... The term "woman" was a term of respect. His initial rebuffing of Mary was more about Jesus being clear about his role and how he understood his ministry to play out in a wider vision. Dealing with wine supply issues was not at the top of his list. And yet he acted.

This first sign was not a "party trick" in the presence of friends. It was more about being intentional about his desire to create abundance. No one was sick... no earthly power needed to be put in its place. Jesus is shown as one who cared about the intimate daily life of God's children. We are seen by Jesus. Our lives and our struggles matter to Him on a personal level. And that Jesus' abundance is not just about volume, it is about expected richness. There is something compelling about Mary spurring that moment on by her actions which spoke that motherly, "I see you. I know who you are. I know what

you can do.” The only other time we see Mary in the Gospel of John is at the foot of the cross. Jesus again says “woman” and Mary shows with her actions, “I know who you are.”

If you are curious about how much six stone water jars equaled. I was listening to a podcast from Luther Seminary this week that suggested biblical anthropologists think it would be the equivalent of 1,000 modern-day wine bottles. Other sources speak of over a hundred gallons of the best wine. Abundance. Grace upon grace, just because.

John’s Gospel is believed to be the last to be written so the author had the ability to look back and make literary and theological connections that the other Gospels writers could not. John speaks of signs - instead of miracles - acts that point us toward the true nature of Jesus.

This sign taking place on the third day naturally points us to the significance of Jesus’ resurrection on the third day and how his miracle of providing “the good wine” when others would be bringing out the lower-grade wine later in the evening might also point us to our understanding of Jesus’ body and blood being the “good wine” in our experience of the Eucharist. With Jesus, there is feasting.

The light referenced in the collect and poetic writings this week seems to spring off the page for me. Such great words like “illumine” and “radiance”. In the dark season of the year, we need those words to be true in the physical world and in our spiritual world.

If we believe Jesus is the Light of the World, where do we notice him shining in our lives? How do we shine in response? The meaning of this church season is to “manifest” or “make known.” As you spend time in prayer what might Jesus be making known to you? The star words given out on the Feast of the Epiphany were one way to tune your heart to prayer and holy imagination. Have you witnessed a flicker of that star word in the last two weeks? If not, don’t give up on it. I believe God is always looking for ways to draw close to us.

In the season of manifesting, we are asked to consider. What do we need from Jesus? I doubt it is 1000 bottles of wine. But I believe that Jesus’ desire to care about our intimate daily life continues. Jesus showing up in the realness of our lives.

My first job out of college was as an adoption and foster care caseworker in Philadelphia. The office was in a former warehouse along 95. There were no walls in the office. Only a sea of desks in a huge room, piled high with files. What we might call an abundance of need. I must have looked like a deer in the highlights because Ms.

Nancy, who sat at the next desk over, took me under her wing. When I would lament about any aspect of the work, she would ask me, “Well, did you tell Jesus about it?” While I was a person of faith, it startled me. “No” I answered for a while. This was work, after all, and not church. Finally one day, Nancy looked up at the ceiling exasperated and said, “Jesus, one of these days, Emily is going to trust that when she calls, you show up.”

It was the first time I realized that I had been following Jesus in theory but not in practice. What if I actually called on Jesus for help? How different would my work be? How different would my LIFE be?

Claiming the fact that in Jesus, Eternal life begins now and not when we die. Trusting that the present is cared for and we are not just moving about our self fulfilling lives until a time when we go on to God. Our life in Christ is now.

That is when I really made space for Jesus in my life. Sitting in a creaky metal chair under harsh fluorescent light, the light of Christ shone down on me. My personal Epiphany and I haven't stopped asking Jesus to show up ever since.

The glory of God is revealed in love. I see it in all of you. The way you are with one another. How you reach out into the world. The power of Jesus is being manifested in you and through you. Do you feel it? Your lives speak of Jesus' life. How I imagine God might be looking at us with the same words Mary had for Jesus, “I know who you are... I know what you have the power to do and be...”. And I have given you the heart to act and the ability to act. Paul's letter to the people in Corinth names those gifts. I wonder what your “manifestation for the common good” is? Spoken more plainly what are your spiritual gifts? How have you been blessed with the ability to be light?

In the coming weeks you will have an opportunity to take a spiritual gifts inventory/assessment so you can come to know your giftedness (if you don't already know). I look forward to seeing how you will shine in light of this knowledge and further discernment. Speaking the words of the collect into being - “Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth.”

*Amen.*