

“Sudden Insight”

Isaiah 62:1-5

Psalm 36:5-10

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11

Seek to be a witness to Jesus. Being a witness to Jesus brings light into darkness and our deepest divisions. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a witness to Jesus calling for unity, opportunity, and equality for all regardless of color and gender. There will be unity, opportunity, and equality in any congregation if these five things permeate a congregation's culture: every person can articulate their faith, belongs to a sub-group like a choir or band, Connect Group, service team, or Sunday school class, is welcoming and inclusive, has close friends in the congregation, and a shared committed to the gospel. This is the glue that creates synergy.

What's that synergy? Loving God. Loving Others. Making Disciples. Ninety percent of new members will stay in a church that has a culture of unity, opportunity, and equality as I just outlined: every person can articulate their faith, belongs to a sub-group like a choir or band, Connect Group, service team, or Sunday school class, is welcoming and inclusive, has close friends in the congregation, and a shared committed to the gospel. I do not know what our percentage is of new members who have stayed and not left through the back door. But over my forty years of ministry, I have heard from new members who have left because one, two, three or all the components of the glue were missing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Willard Black in *Leadership Journal*, Vol. 4, no. 3.

Isaiah 62 is filled with promise for the future and the people's identity being restored by God. Zion's husband will not forget her. The people are the bride and God is the bridegroom. The metaphor of marriage is an early messianic prophecy of the Messiah, Jesus, being the bridegroom. Isaiah 62:5 reads, "For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." God rejoices over you. Jesus is the bridegroom, and the Church is the bride. The biblical image of "marriage...covenant" shouts sudden insight about the importance of relationships, with God, others, church life, marriage, and family. Seeking God for unity, opportunity and equality in any relationship is essential.

A primary need that every human being has is to have sudden insight on what matters most. Sometimes, we just need to stop what we're doing and act on that insight God has given us that disunity, lack of opportunity, and inequality are fundamentally harmful. Anne Lamott, a Christian, author, and public speaker notes,

When Pammy and I returned to school in the fall of my junior year, terrible news unfolded: our English teacher Sue had become a born-again Christian. And apparently all the students who were her friends, about a dozen or so, had been brought into the fold during the later summer, and now they all met in the courtyard during lunch to pray, to read from the Bible, and to beam at each other with amusement. Sue would still hand out the most wonderful poems in her class—Sylvia Plath and Auden, T.S. Eliot, Ferlinghetti—but now she interpreted everything in Christian terms; it was all viewed through Christ's eyes and determined to be about resurrection or original sin...Pammy and I fought back. We read the great atheists, studied their reasoning, especially Bertrand Russell's essay "Why I Am Not a Christian," which we basically memorized. We challenged Sue on everything, every assertion, even when she was right.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), 21-22.

Anger toward Sue and many of her friends becoming Christians festered into a sudden insight years later that God loved her, and Anne responded to that love by believing in Jesus Christ as her Savior and Lord.

As you recall, the season of Epiphany is a season of revelation, that is, God radically breaking into human experience. Revelation provides sudden insight. Epiphany reminds us that God has a plan for salvation in Jesus. Being a follower of Jesus is the key to overcome disunity, lack of opportunity, and inequality. Jesus' baptism gives us insight into God's ongoing action in humanity toward that end of salvation in Jesus for eternal life and a better way of living now.

On the third day of Jesus' public ministry a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother Mary went to him and said, "They have no more wine." John 2:3 reads, "When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.'" Mary wants the events of the wedding celebration to go well. At weddings in the first century, wine was the celebrative drink. The groom would bring out the best wine first and once everyone had their fill, he would then bring out the cheaper stuff. Jesus is put off by the question. He's not ready to begin his public ministry. Jesus knows what his mother is asking. She wants him to turn water into wine.

Jesus is called upon to perform a miracle. He instructed the servants to fill jars used for ceremonial washing with water. And then, Jesus turned water into wine. When the master of the banquet received the jar, its content was not water. It was wine. It wasn't cheap wine. It was fine wine, the best wine. Jesus' first miracle was a radical inbreaking of God's presence, a revelation, a sudden insight. Jesus honored a family and the family's guests at a wedding. This miracle demonstrated Jesus' unconditional love for

people. Jesus wanted each person to know that they were a child of God and that by believing in him they would not perish but have eternal life and a better life now.

And such is the case today. You are a child of God. You are unconditionally loved by God. Matthew L. Skinner, Professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, writes, “Jesus remains manifest when his followers follow his lead, promoting abundant wholeness through public proclamation, advocacy, service, charity, artistic expression, and imagination.”<sup>3</sup> Seek to be a witness to Jesus. Being a witness to Jesus brings light into darkness and our deepest divisions. God’s grace, abundance, delight, and wonder bring salvation into our, yours, and my experience. Your salvation in and through Jesus Christ brings light into darkness and transforms disunity into unity, lack of opportunity into opportunity, and inequality into equality. Do you need that sudden insight? Amen!

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations) on Sunday, 16 January 2022 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh in the Sanctuary at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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<sup>3</sup>Matthew L. Skinner in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 191.