

Epiphany 2 – C  
January 20, 2019  
The Rev. Dorian McGlannan

2018 was the year of the beast, well actually it wasn't. In Chinese astrology, it was the year of the dog. But for me personally and our family, it was the year of the beast. I shut the door on 2018 with a loud slam saying good riddance. May the perils of 2018 never creep into our lives again. I won't burden you with the details of most of it - too much is too personal but I will give you a sampling. Two weeks before our move date to the island, my husband critically injured his back and went into emergency surgery at Harborview, only his emergency got put off five days because of various car accidents, people falling off of mountains, a backcountry skiing accident in Alaska and so forth. All the kinds of emergencies that end up in a trauma hospital... That is just one thing that happened to us. And it wasn't the worst.

For our country, for the world in general, 2018 was also full of trials and tribulations, much worse than what our family experienced actually, most of which continue today with new heartbreak of the partial government shutdown. It is shameful.

Through the difficult times of 2018, I had trouble seeing the abundance of life though as I reflect on those times, I am aware that abundance was all around me: the brilliant surgeon who repaired my husband's mangled back, the fact that we even had health care, our buddhist monk friend who frequently visited Harborview while we were there, family who helped with the enormous amount of packing we still had to do during those last two weeks before moving, friends and family who helped move the things the movers couldn't move and the meals brought to us by friends on the island, the fact that we even have a place to live when so many don't. Abundance indeed.

Abundance is woven into today's gospel reading even though this reading from John is a bit puzzling. Jesus' first miracle, according to John, is turning water into wine. In engaging this text, we might ask: Why on earth would Jesus' first miracle be that of turning water into wine? Why not a spectacular healing miracle? Why not a miracle of ending poverty? Why not a miracle of ending war? We could certainly use such miracles today! Why is Jesus using his powers to ensure that people who are already drunk can have even more to drink?! The miracle at the wedding at Cana makes no sense to us unless we see it and in fact experience it as a story of abundance.

We are in the season of Epiphany, the time of year when the church celebrates the wonder of God being with us in the person of Jesus Christ. As soon as Jesus was born, the world began to change. Life began to overflow with an abundance of love, healing and grace. The story of the first miracle at Cana of Galilee is a story that opens our hearts to the possibility of living lives of abundance regardless of our circumstances. Mary says modestly to Jesus, "They have no wine". In this story, wine is a symbol of hope for the human race. Jesus replies strangely: "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." It is true that Jesus' public life had not yet unfolded. But Mary took her son to task. She knew that people needed the full rich wine of life; they needed hope. They needed an action that would let them experience abundance.

What does it mean to live a life of abundance? Perhaps it is to recognize that God offers us possibilities all of the time and that saying yes can enrich and liberate us. Our lives are not mapped out in some pre-ordered way with God pushing buttons when it is just the right time for us to get a new job or graduate from school. Our lives are full of interaction with God; it is an ongoing dance. Living lives of abundance frees us to make decisions that do not necessarily make sense in terms of the values of the world. Every step that we take, every moment that we breath is full of God opportunities. If we are listening, we can respond. Living in abundance allows us to set fear aside and live with faith.

The story of the first miracle of turning water into wine poses hard questions for us because it challenges conventional assumptions about order and control, about what is possible, about where God is found and how God is known. The force of this miracle is felt precisely from the fact that it is so extraordinary. The grace this miracle offers is outside the confines of conventional expectations and places us at odds with how we think the world is ordered. Our task is not to try to make sense of this miracle but to simply free

ourselves to just experience it. Right from the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, the author of the gospel of John is letting us know of the unprecedented grace that God offers us in the person of Jesus Christ.

The miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee has some notable points. One is the ease with which the miracle happens. There are no prayers, no fanfare. Jesus simply tells the stewards to fill the jars with water. When they taste the water, it is no longer water – it is now wine. This enables us to see miracles as a part of everyday life and not to wait and hope for some sort of spectacular event. This miracle story allows us to open our eyes and take note of the miracles of everyday life, the miracle of being able to say yes when the world would tell us to say no, the miracle of endless love which Jesus offers us, the miracle of a peaceful heart even in the midst of strife. These are experiences of abundance because love is something which is endless. In this story, Jesus is letting us know of the abundance of God's love and that when we live with a sense of abundance, our lives will be forever blessed.

The extravagance of Jesus' act, the superabundance of wine, suggests the unlimited gifts Jesus makes available. Jesus' ministry begins with an extraordinary gift of grace, a first glimpse of greater things to come. This story invites us to see what the disciples see, that in the abundance and graciousness of Jesus' gift, we are able to catch a glimpse of the identity and character of our loving God. With that we are able to proclaim that we have received grace upon grace.

I have to say that in the midst of all that happened in 2018 for us as a family, it was hard to see the abundance. And for most of us, when we are caught in challenging circumstances, it is difficult to do anything but weep. But somehow we have to keep our eyes on the horizon and know that God is with us. We have to keep moving forward letting go of the things that we cannot change, remembering the times when water has been turned into wine, having faith that those miracles will again return us to hope and abundance. This weekend is, of course, Martin Luther King weekend; a weekend we remember in order that we can hold onto the witness of such a phenomenal voice for justice. We remember that time when water was changed into wine by the courage of the civil rights activists. They are our inspiration and hope for the present and the future.

There are many others, of course, who give us courage to see water turned into wine. One is a beloved poet named Mary Oliver. On Thursday, the world lost Mary Oliver, a woman who nourished the hearts of endless souls. Her poem "I Worried" speaks to this whole idea of changing our perspective of seeing that water has been changed into wine.

### **I Worried - Mary Oliver**

**I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers  
flow in the right direction, will the earth turn  
as it was taught, and if not how shall  
I correct it?  
Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven,  
can I do better?  
Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows  
can do it and I am, well,  
hopeless.  
Is my eyesight fading or am I just imagining it,  
am I going to get rheumatism,  
lockjaw, dementia?  
Finally I saw that worrying had come to nothing.  
And gave it up. And took my old body  
and went out into the morning  
and sang.**

