



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Epiphany 2 (C)
January 20, 2019

[RCL] Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

Isaiah 62:1-5

Weddings are times of great celebration for a family, a community, and especially for a couple who are beginning a new life together. The prophet uses this image of bridegroom and bride as an example of how God sees God's people. At a wedding, the sense of love is tangible as the couple looks at each other with delight.

The name of God's people is changed from "Forsaken" to "My Delight is in Her" and this name change is initiated by the Lord. A change in name indicates a change in identity, and when I got married, the many places where I needed to register my new name was extensive, so it felt like I was letting the nations know. There was nothing I did to earn the love of my spouse, and I did not have to perform in order to deserve it. Perhaps that is why we see so many references to marriage in the Bible—because it is the most intimate relationship people can have, and it is love that is without conditions and never earned. There is nothing I can do that will cause me to gain more of God's love than exists at this moment. Similarly, there is nothing I can ever do that will cause God to love me any less than God does right now. God loves us because it is God's nature to love.

- What is God's name for you?
- Do you have a sense of God delighting in you and rejoicing over you?

Psalm 36:5-10

God's love is vast and incomprehensible and unending. Standing at the south rim of the Grand Canyon, the vista is magnificent. That is the image that comes to mind when considering God's love reaching to the heavens, and how tiny I felt in relation to my surroundings. Even with the immeasurable grandeur of God's love, the people of God can cluster like baby chicks under the shadow of God's wing for protection. This is the both/and aspect of God: incomprehensibly great *and* profoundly intimate at the same time.

Loving-kindness is the translation of *chesed*, a Hebrew word that has implications of loyalty and commitment that goes far beyond what would be expected by the law or duty. This love is beyond

imagination, and as overwhelming as staring across the Grand Canyon. God's love provides all we need for life: nourishment, light, and protection.

- What does it mean to be “true of heart?”
- Is there any aspect of your heart that seems false and you might choose to relinquish?
- Where are you invited to consider showing loving-kindness (care beyond duty or law) to those you encounter this week?

I Corinthians 12:1-11

In a society that is based on transactions, gifts muck up the works. The adage, “You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours,” encapsulates many of our interactions from day to day. I pay for coffee for my friend this week, and next week, she picks up the tab. I have noticed that if I am always expected to pay, I start to feel resentful and ungenerous. When I receive a gift from a friend that seems “over-generous” I feel uncomfortable. I desire balance in relationships: an equal give and take, so I feel neither obliged nor taken advantage of. Contrast this to the love of God who gives gifts to us again and again and again, and we never pick up the tab.

Paul is writing to the church in Corinth where one-upmanship is apparently a problem. Humans love a pecking order and knowing who is the most important in the room. Paul says that spiritual gifts are given for the common good, and the Spirit chooses who receives which gift. Gifts are not earned or deserved, they are simply received. In human terms, we are often more impressed with one gift than another. I am usually most impressed by those who have gifts that I am lacking. Paul levels the playing field by saying that it is one Spirit, one God, and all gifts are for the common good (not to create a hierarchy). The manner in which I order gifts is disorder in God's eyes.

- What is one of your gifts that you use for the common good?
- How have you viewed gifts as transactions?

John 2:1-11

Jesus' first miracle in this gospel is the transformation of water to wine. The evangelist writes that there are seven signs (or miracles) that include healings, feeding, raising Lazarus from the dead and walking on water. This first sign takes place at a wedding, and Jesus' mother comes to him because they have run out of wine. In the time of Christ, weddings lasted a week, and running out of wine would be a humiliation for the families. Was Mary related to those getting married, or was she simply attuned to their distress and convinced that her son could help? Jesus takes the ordinary water and transforms it into “good wine,” made for celebration.

Healing and feeding are arguably necessary for life, and yet in the first miracle recorded, it is the transformation of something very ordinary: water into wine for celebration. This miracle also had limited exposure, because the servants knew where the wine was from, but when it was all consumed, there would be no remaining evidence of the miracle. Contrast this miracle to the raising of Lazarus; this miracle might

appear somewhat frivolous and common, with limited impact on the community, but as a sign, it tells us about Jesus. This fine wine (120 to 180 gallons of it) reflects the abundance of God found in the psalm. Weddings are common experiences, and Jesus showed up there.

- Where have you noticed signs of Jesus in the common?
- What is ordinary in your life that might be transformed into a cause for celebration by Jesus?

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