

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People
Second Sunday of Epiphany – Year C

RCL Readings – Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 35:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

ACNA Readings – Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 96; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

Introduction. Epiphany is the season of the Christian calendar between Christmas and Lent. Depending on when Easter falls, Epiphany can be between five and nine weeks. This year Easter falls late, so we will have eight weeks of Epiphany. During the season of Epiphany, the focus continues to be on how God manifests himself to the whole world.

Common Theme. The readings centre around the Gospel portion in which Jesus manifests his power through his first miracle, the water to wine. Each of the readings discusses in some form or another how God reveals and manifests himself, his glory and power to all the world. Revealing the Messiah to the world is now one of our tasks, and we have the gift of the Spirit to assist us along the way.

Isaiah 62:1-5. This prophetic portion envisages a redemptive transformation for Zion and Jerusalem that will be visible to the nations of the earth. The text is not clear as to who makes the declaration of coming salvation and who will not keep silent. Is it the prophet, God or the Messiah? Perhaps it is all three! At the time of this prophetic call, Jerusalem was materially prosperous although the rot of spiritual corruption had set in. And a time was coming when Jerusalem would lie desolate for her sins. Through Isaiah, we see the prophetic promise that God will act in a salvific fashion on behalf of his city and his people. The coming redemption is not only localized but is something that even the Gentile nations will see. New names, Hephzibah and Beulah, are pronounced over the city and land. This does not remove or replace the old names of Zion and Jerusalem. Biblical names often come with meanings that are used prophetically. Hephzibah means ‘My delight is in her’, referring to God’s continued faithfulness towards the city of Jerusalem in whom he delights to put his Name. Beulah comes from the verb *ba’al* which means ‘lord and husband’ and in context means ‘being in a married relationship’. God continues to be faithful to his covenantal relationship with Israel. He will redeem his broken people and all nations will see his righteousness and his salvation through the Messiah.

Psalm 35:5-10. It is uncertain to commentators at which point in David’s career did the king pen this psalm. From the context of the psalm, David is experiencing oppression from some unknown quarter and seeks the Lord’s intervention. David provides us with a good demonstration of how to pray appropriately when malicious people seek to harm us. The faithful can pray that the schemes of the persecutors would fail and come to nothing. This does not go against the command to love your enemies nor turn the other cheek. Enduring trials and tribulations through the power of the Spirit is indeed a good and noble thing. However, one of the appropriate ways for us to pray during suffering is also to ask for God to defend us. He is our shield and defender. In verse 9, David tells us he will rejoice in God’s salvation. This is a helpful reminder for us, too, that we should never take God’s redemptive work lightly nor forget his work of salvation through the Messiah. Instead, we should try to restore again the joy of our salvation.

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1 Corinthians 12:1-11. This well-known passage discusses the manifestation of spiritual gifts among the people of God for the good of all. The opening verse of the Greek text only has the plural adjective of 'spiritual' (πνευματικῶν, *pneumatikon*). The word 'gifts' is added to the text by the translators. In context, Paul could be referring to spiritual gifts or spiritual people and perhaps both.¹ Paul doesn't want the Corinthians community to be ignorant of the gifts of God. Paul reminds the Corinthians that prior to faith in Jesus they were pagan worshippers of idols that neither spoke nor gave benefits to their adherents. In contrast, we serve a living God who knows how to bestow good gifts to his people. The Corinthians now believe in a God who is actively involved with his followers through the work of his Spirit. Paul presents a list of a diversity of gifts of the Spirit but emphasizes they all come from the same source, the one giver of gifts. The gifts are diverse, with varied effects and activities, and the ministries they produce are diverse. We are not all given the same gifts and do not all have the same ministries. Differences among people can lead to pride, although they shouldn't. The gifts are not given for the glorification of any one individual but for the benefit of everyone. This is an encouragement for us all to seek the fellowship of other believers. We need each other and the different gifts that the Spirit has provided. I need the benefit of the gifts that God has given you. Conversely, to have access to the gift God has given me, then we need to be in fellowship together. There is a dynamic partnership of the spiritual gifts in which the Spirit of God gives, and we receive and exercise that which is given for the good of the body of Messiah.

John 2:1-11. At the wedding in Cana, Jesus manifests His power for the first time to perform his first miraculous sign. Out of all the possible miracles Jesus could do as his first sign, why turn water into wine? How does what appears to be a 'party trick' reveal the glory of who Jesus is? I suggest that, in its Hebraic context, this miracle is one of the best. Let me explain. Weddings were, and still are, major events in the life of the community. To reflect on how important weddings were in the late Second Temple Period, there is a Jewish midrash that says if a group of mourners encounters a group of wedding revealers, the mourners must stop their mourning, dry their tears and join the wedding celebration. Only after the wedding can they go back to mourn the dead. In Cana, Jesus and Mary are in attendance as this is probably a family relation on Mary's side. Note that Joseph (most likely deceased) and the siblings of Jesus are not mentioned as present. Jesus has already gathered disciples and they accompany their rabbi to the wedding. Discipleship in the Second Temple Period meant that the students lived with their teachers 24/7. Disciples learned by observing their rabbi's daily routine, not only through verbal instruction during a Bible study. By taking his students to the wedding, the disciples are learning that their master is not a social separationist. Jesus does not retreat from society and await the

¹ In the Dead Sea community at Qumran they linked both the Spirit and deeds of Spirit together in a person. The Dead Sea community would examine each member annually to see how spiritual they were and how they used the Spirit in practice. 1 QS 5:23-23 says, 'They shall have an investigation of their spirits and their deeds year by year, so as to elevate each one according to his understanding'. In the theology of the Dead Sea Sect, they believed the Spirit of Truth was given in various degrees only to the elect (cf. to every follower of Jesus) for the benefit of the whole community.

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rapture. Instead, he is involved in community life, in this case, the celebration of a new couple in marriage. Being salt and light to the world means being involved with the world and not withdrawing from it. Marriage is important in Jewish thought, with God making the first wedding couple by creating Eve as a companion for Adam. Wine is a symbol of joy in Jewish tradition, but perhaps through poor planning or too many guests, the wine runs out before the wedding celebration is concluded. In a culture of honour and shame, this is a disaster for the host family. Mary approaches Jesus and raises the issue. Interestingly, Jesus responds by saying, 'My time has not yet come'.

We recall that at 12 years old Jesus was in 'his Father's house' prepared to go about the Father's business. It was Joseph and Mary who made Jesus return with them to Nazareth, where he grew in wisdom and favour with God. Mary, who has pondered the words of Gabriel since the annunciation, knows that her son is now ready and that his time has indeed come. The disciples would have been observing this encounter and learning that their rabbi obeys the Torah and the commandment to honour his mother. Jesus now performs his first miracle. Taking water, he instructs servants to take it to the master of ceremonies. Somewhere along the way, it becomes wine.

In Jewish tradition, when a new bottle of wine is opened, a blessing must be recited. The blessing over wine is recorded in *Sefer Brachot* (The Book of Blessings) in a discussion between Shammai and Hillel over when and how often to recite the blessing. Shammai and Hillel are one generation prior to Jesus, so the blessing was in use in Jesus' day. At the wedding in Cana, the master of ceremonies received the new wine and in a loud voice would have recited the blessing as follows: 'Blessed are you the Lord our God, King of the Universe. You create the fruit of the vine'. At this point, the disciples have an aha moment. Who just made the fruit of the vine? Jesus. According to the blessing, only who can do that? God. The text of John says that the disciples now put their faith in Jesus, not because of a cute 'party trick' but because in a very Jewish way Jesus has revealed who he really is, creator of the fruit of the vine, the King of the Universe. This makes the water to wine one of the best miracles and perhaps the best way for Jesus to begin his ministry, by proclaiming who he really is.

ACNA Readings

Psalm 96. Salvation in the Psalms is often portrayed as universal, that God's redemption would be experienced by all nations of the world. Here again, the whole earth, not just the people of Israel, are called to sing a new song of praise to the Lord. At the time of the psalm's composing, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would only have been known in regional circles. The opening verse shows us that the psalmist understood the Lord to be the God of all the earth and that in the future the entire world would come to worship and praise him. In antiquity, new music was often created to commemorate military victories or political alliances with national celebrations. In this psalm, the praise of God is not linked to a victorious battle but rather to the glorious characteristics of God. Unlike the idols of the other nations, which are really nothing, God is beautiful in majestic power, strength, and holiness. Beauty and

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holiness are not often connected together in our modern culture. What our culture defines as beautiful can be fickle and lack endurance. The idiom 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' shows us how subjective the perception of beauty really is. God is not bound to our cultural norms as he is perpetually holy and perpetually beautiful. His glorious majesty is something that knows no boundary and no end. The psalmist reminds us that God's reign both now and in the future will extend to the ends of the world. All nations will experience Epiphany, that is, the revelation of the love of God through Jesus the Messiah.

About the author. The Rev. Aaron Eime is a deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and a teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master's program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.