

“Defining Moments”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Epiphany, Sunday, January 20, 2013

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Holy Scriptures: Isaiah 62: 1-5 John 2: 1-11

Isaiah 62

For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent,

and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest,

until her vindication shines out like the dawn,

and her salvation like a burning torch.

2 The nations shall see your vindication,

and all the kings your glory;

and you shall be called by a new name

that the mouth of the Lord will give.

3 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,

and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

4 You shall no more be termed Forsaken,

and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;

but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land Married;
for the Lord delights in you,
and your land shall be married.

5 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.

John 2

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. ⁹ When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk.

But you have kept the good wine until now.”¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.

Defining Moments

If you were listening to sports talk radio on Monday
you might have overheard a public conversation
across our fair city's airwaves.

A local sports jock asked listeners to call in and name
what they believed was the defining moment
of the Falcon's victory over the Seahawks last
Sunday.

Was the defining moment Atlanta's game-winning drive and
field goal,

or was it the two field goal opportunities

that the Seahawks' coach decided not to kick in
the first half?

Was it a big catch or sack or penalty,
or was it more sublime?

I was fascinated that as many people who called in
there were different opinions on what was the
defining moment.

No two perspectives were the same,
and most sounded pretty plausible.

All I know is that the proverbial monkey was lifted from our
home team's back,
and a defining moment is to finally feel the incredible
lightness of being.

One could say that a defining moment

is obvious, visible, radical, and worthy of an
investment of good energy.

If you listed defining moments of history, what might top
your charts?

Or how about your own life?

This is a fun exercise to try sometime, using a timeline and
creativity,

and you will discover that its fluid, ever evolving and
changing as you grow.

If we were to ask every Christian

what was a defining moment of Jesus of Nazareth's
life,

we might get as many different answers,

and that would be just fine.

One such moment that helped to initiate and launch his
ministry of grace

happened at a wedding in Cana.

And his mother Mary had a lot to do with it.

You see, that was the day Jesus' mother Mary

said to the people gathered at the wedding, "Do
whatever he tells you to do."

*"Mother Mary comes to me speaking words of
wisdom.*

Let it be. Let it be." (Lennon and McCartney)

Mother Mary appears exactly twice in the Gospel of John.

Mary's appearances bookend, if you will,

the telling of the earthly ministry of Jesus.

We first meet Mary, the mother of Jesus,

in the second chapter of John at a wedding in Cana.

She spurs her hesitant son to begin his miraculous work of healing and hope.

We'll get back to that in a moment.

We do not encounter Mary again in John's Gospel until Jesus is on the cross.

John 19 reads:

“Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother,

and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her,

he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.”

Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.”

And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.”

As we behold the Christ we are beheld.

As we behold one another we are afforded the opportunity to be held,

to embrace and cherish one another as children of God.

In the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Mary is a catalyst;
and at the end of his life on earth
she accepts his charge to love and grows
forward.

God's mission of grace

renews lives, grows disciples, and transforms the
human condition.

God looks to us from the cross and the skies and calls out,

"Here is your neighbor."

We are to take each other into the shelter of our
hearts.

Now let's go back to the wedding, to the beginning,

to Christ's launching pad of ministry.

*On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee,
and the mother of Jesus was there.*

*²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the
wedding.*

*³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him,
"They have no wine."*

*⁴And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to
you and to me?"*

My hour has not yet come."

⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Imagine that prior to this conversation there had been many more.

Mary and her son had talked and talked.

You know she fussed when he stayed behind in Jerusalem at age 12.

Surely they had heart-to-heart talks at the kitchen table,
while walking back and forth to the well for water,
while contemplating the stars and the cosmos.

Over the years they fostered and developed a solid trust and mutual respect.

He knew he could trust her judgment and count on her support.

She knew Jesus gifts, and she understood they were supernatural.

She also knew he was hesitant,
hesitant to use his gifts for his own good,
hesitant to make a splash and draw attention to himself,
and hesitant to get started on the road less travelled.

So in Cana of Galilee when the wine ran out and the party started to die,

Mary said simply, *“They have no wine.”*

Jesus said, *“My hour has not yet come.”*

In other words, *“I’m not ready. I am waiting for a sign.*

*How about if I let you know when it’s time
for me to get started on being a Messiah.”*

Mary must have been thinking, *“My God, Jesus is 30 years old.*

*I will not be held responsible for a
failure to launch!”*

Instead she turned to the servants and said, *“Do whatever he tells you to do.”*

“Do whatever he tells you to do.”

The time had come to begin, and with that simple sentence of instruction

Mother Mary’s words of wisdom spurred Jesus into action,

and the world and you and I have never been the same.

Mary had faith that the Son of God would use his gifts for the common good.

She saw that miracles and ministry are a team sport grounded in trust.

In order for people to have food and drink, relationships and meaning

and the basic necessities of life

we are simply, positively going to have to work together.

“Do whatever he tells you to do.”

Jesus then gave the servants instructions.

They did as he commanded and all credit went to the bridegroom and the steward.

That’s fine.

We are not here for the credit;

we are here to make a difference;

we are here to build up the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

Who cares who gets the credit

as long as our brothers in sisters in Haiti and Cuba, Algeria and Mali

have water and food, economic relief and political peace?

Who cares who gets star billing

as long as effective solutions to senseless violence and abuse

are put into effect?

Who cares who gets their name in lights

as long as we resolve the morass in the Middle East

and bring our sons and daughters home?

“Do whatever he tells you to do.”

Listen for the instructions.

Thank God we do not have failures to launch in this congregation!

We are too talented and beautiful to sit on our haunches and be entertained.

You already have gifts and talents and the Spirit.

The difference between a talent and a spiritual gift is how it is used.

How are you using your gifts?

Are you striving to leave the world a better place than the way you found it?

Are you using your gifts to serve God in this urban mission field called Atlanta?

in the market place? on Wall Street and Main Street?

“Do whatever he tells you to do.”

Jesus of Nazareth first used his supernatural gifts of God
amongst everyday folks in a common setting,
a wedding celebration in Cana.

We can receive this as a blessed reminder

that our spiritual gifts are not something to be
hoarded

or covered up or saved for a special day,

but rather a gift to be shared and utilized

in the everyday occurrences of
life.

Wherever you are, whatever defining moments pop up and
present themselves,

God is doing mighty works through you!

Imagine taking a walk in the woods along a mountain trail,

one where you encounter a sign by the movement
called Leave No Trace,

a center for outdoor ethics:

The simple sign reads:

“Take only pictures, leave only footprints.”

As you go move and grow through this dance called life,
consider what you are carrying away with you.

What footprints, what impact, what legacy will you leave
behind?

How might you help define moments and lives for the
greater good?

“Do whatever he tells you to do.”

...and then let it be,

*...and you will be filled with the power
of the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*