

Sermon & Prayers for January 16, 2022
Second Sunday after Epiphany, Year C
Bishop Bill Gafkjen, Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, source of every blessing, you showed forth your glory and led many to faith by the works of your Son, who brought gladness and salvation to his people. Transform us by the Spirit of his love, that we may find our life together in him, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Isaiah 62:1-5

¹For 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.
²The 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.
³You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
⁴You 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.
⁵For 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.

Psalm 36:5-10

⁵Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens,
and your faithfulness to the clouds.
⁶Your righteousness is like the strong mountains, your justice like the great deep;
you save humankind and animals, O Lord.
⁷How priceless is your love, O God!
All people take refuge under the shadow of your wings.
⁸They feast upon the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from the river of your delights.
⁹For with you is the well of life,
and in your light we see light.
¹⁰Continue your lovingkindness to those who know you,
and your favor to those who are true of heart.

John 2:1-11

¹On 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." ⁶Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. ⁹When 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 ¹⁰and 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." ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in abundance, beloved children of God, from God our Creator, through the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Oh, how expansive, how steadfast, how abundant and far-reaching, how deep and wide are the justice, mercy, and love of God!

God's love, the poet proclaims, reaches to the heavens, God's faithfulness to the clouds.
God's righteousness is mountainous, God's justice oceanic.
God's salvation extends to all humankind and creation, even animals!

This is the abundant, abiding, expansive glory of God that those ancient wedding goers in Cana glimpsed in the gallons and gallons of fine wine that Jesus worked from water on the third day of the party.

This is the radiant resurrecting justice, mercy, and love that was lifted high on a cross and, also on the third day, burst from a tomb to wrap the world in the promise of new, abundant, and lasting life for all.

This is the glory of God: expansive, steadfast, abundant justice, mercy, and love, higher than mountains, deeper than the sea.

Thanks be to God, we have received this glorious gift in the washing of water and Word. It comes to us over and again in the bread broken and wine poured, in prayer and scripture, and in the loving, merciful, justice-working presence of others who, like the bread and wine, are for us.

What's more, we are called to be that presence for others, to share this glorious gift as freely, abundantly, and expansively as we have seen and received it, that all may see and know the glory of God.

And yet...yes there is almost always an "and yet" when it comes to we human beings in the light of God's glory...and yet, we try to narrow the reach of this love. Consciously and unconsciously, we omit others from this justice. We hoard God's mercy for ourselves.

Perhaps that's why we need poets and prophets, to remind us just how expansive God's love is and the Holy Spirit, like Mary with Jesus, to implore and impel us to open our hearts and hands to share it.

This is why we need poets and prophets like Martin Luther King and others – especially from or in solidarity with communities that have not experienced the expansiveness and abundance of God's glory – poets and prophets who believe in and give themselves to the promise of God's steadfast justice, mercy, and love for all. We need these poets and prophets and storytellers who, like God as characterized in Isaiah 62, will not keep silent and will not rest until vindication for all shines out like the dawn and salvation like a burning torch.

And so also, we who bear the mark of the Christ of Cana and cross on our brows and who are sealed in the Spirit of God's abundant far-reaching love known in Jesus are called to not keep silent or rest until the glory of God's steadfast justice, mercy and love reach all people and creation in their rich and beautiful diversity.

Thankfully, we are not each responsible for the whole world; that responsibility belongs to God. We do each have our particular gifts and call and we have been placed in particular communities and arenas of influence. We do our part in revealing the glory of God's love when we look around us, listen deeply, and ask "What needs the transformative and redeeming power of Jesus and what gifts do I, does my community of faith, have to offer?"

Of course, we might often be like Jesus at Cana: hesitant, wondering what it's got to do with us, or thinking that it's not the right time, or believing that the need is too great for us to address. Perhaps that's when, like Jesus' mother, the Holy Spirit – through some poet or prophet or preacher – insists that now is indeed the time and we are indeed the ones sent to share the good and abundant wine of God's justice, mercy, and love with those who need it most...that all people and creation may see and know the glory of God.

For, dear siblings in Christ, God's love reaches to the heavens, and God's faithfulness to the clouds.

God's righteousness is like the strong mountains, God's justice like the great deep. The Lord saves humankind and all creation.

And so we pray with the poets and prophets:

How priceless is your love, O God! All people take refuge under the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light. Continue your lovingkindness and favor for all through us, O God, and open our eyes and hearts to see your glory in and through others.

Thanks be to God. Amen

Prayers of Intercessionⁱ

The Spirit of the Lord is poured out upon us in abundance; so we are bold to pray for the church, the world, and all that God has made.

A brief silence.

By your Spirit, activate within your church gifts of faith, healing, and prophecy. Unite those who profess your name across congregations, denominations, and geographic boundaries. Open our hearts to recognize and celebrate surprising miracles. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Your creation reflects your generosity. Bless farmers, migrant farmworkers, orchard-keepers, ranchers, and all who tend the abundance of the land. Protect food and water sources from destruction, that all can eat and drink and be satisfied. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

By your Spirit, grant wisdom, knowledge, and discernment to those who hold leadership positions at any level. Direct policymakers toward compassionate decisions that build up safe and just communities. Lead all authorities in seeking and serving the common good. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

As Jesus provided generously in a moment of need, provide generous gifts of healing for those in need this day. Provide abundantly for all who are hungry or thirsty, all seeking shelter, and all who seek peace. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

You see us for who we are and you delight in us. Embrace those struggling with self-worth, wrestling with self-identity, or facing significant life transition. Remind us that nothing can separate us from your love. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered, especially for those recently experiencing tragedy, tornadoes and other weather-related destruction, and others who come to mind.

You bless us through the spiritual gifts of the saints who have gone before us. We give thanks for the life of Martin Luther King Jr. and all who have modeled the way of courageous faith. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Since we have such great hope in your promises, O God, we lift these and all of our prayers to you in confidence and faith; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

ⁱ Prayers, including the Prayer of the Day, adapted from SundaysandSeasons.com.