

“Come and See - A Dimension of Mystery”

January 14, 2018

Scripture Lesson: John 2: 1-11

Prayer of Illumination:

God of Life, may the words of my mouth,
and the meditations of all our minds and hearts,
lead us to deeper understanding of you,
and the love you call us to live. Amen.

I need you to know that for a time this week I wondered whether this sermon would be possible. My computer died on Monday afternoon and I lived with the uncertainty of when I would have computer capacity at my desk for about 24 hours. It seemed that on Tuesday morning everything I went to do involved needing my computer, so I had to go to the desperate step of cleaning piles off my desk!

Our computer support guy - Stan - came in on Tuesday afternoon and took memory and video cards out of the computer, blew the dust off - and put them back in and no luck. He thought he would try it again, realized the video card was redundant and put the two memory cards in. And the computer booted up and was okay. Why the difference the second time? Stan and I were pleasantly perplexed and the best explanation was that, maybe it was because the Merry Songsters - the senior's fun singing group - were singing Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah during the second round of memory card removal and reinstalling. Stan and I laughed and thought that was the best explanation we could come up with.

Some of you were here on Christmas Eve at the 5 pm service where the theme was angel messages. I had clues for finding the different angels messages and I began the first theme conversation with the children by saying that the first clue had been on my desk when I had arrived back for the service.

Well, the inquisition began. Who do you think put it there? How would someone get into your office, etc. My attempt at introducing an element of mystery into the situation - didn't have the effect I hoped. And I knew I was in trouble when it came time for the second clue which was in my jacket pocket. "How did the clue get in there? ... Inquiring minds wanted to know. I loved that spontaneity about the children's response.

Yet, it also reminds me that as a culture we have an expectation that everything is understandable, that we will be able to solve mystery and with enough knowledge and enough scientific scrutiny and research we will be able know how and why things happen.

We have even defined faith in some contexts as believing that which isn't yet understood. We sometimes say, "we don't know enough so we will take it on faith that something is true."

“And yet heaven's bright with mystery and science searches nature's art,

when all creation yearns for peace and hope sinks deep in human hearts, appear to us, O Holy Light; lift from our eyes the shades of night.”

There is a dimension of life that is unexplainable. Faith is a trust that is not necessarily connected to belief or understanding.

Today, we continue our journey in the season of Epiphany. Appear to us O Holy Light. It is a time when we remember how the holy was made known to the Magi and who as a result had to find a new way home. In this time of Epiphany we gather the resources of wisdom and, grace and courage that enable u to discern our path as we move into the future to know Holy Light, Mystery and Love.

Last week, we heard the story out of the first chapter of John’s gospel where the disciples were called and the invitation of Jesus was to Come and See. It was an initiation that Nathaneal responded to after he got beyond the bias and barrier of wondering if anything good could come out of Nazareth? Come and See - is an invitation that is offered to each one who listens and seeks meaning and hope in the story and life of Jesus.

Today we have heard the story of the Wedding at Cana and it is a delightful story about abundance and celebration. With the temperance roots of The United Church of Canada - particularly through our Methodist ancestors - this is an embarrassing story. I don’t imagine that my grandfather ever preached on this story because he had signed the temperance pledge.

And yet it is a story that invites the curious detectives among us to wonder - how did that happen? How did water become wine?

This is the author of John’s first story of Jesus’ public ministry and as one commentator put it, the first public story in each gospel reveals a lot about what the gospel writer feels about who Jesus is. John’s gospel is very different from the other gospels. There is no temptation in the wilderness story in John. The prologue to John proclaims that Jesus is the Word made flesh and so there is no slow revealing of his identity and purpose. It is clear from the beginning that John sees Jesus as fully divine and fully human and so there is added dimension to this gospel. It is filled with layers of symbol and metaphor and enriched meaning. And the gospel is filled with stories with details we might not be able to solve. It is filled with stories and conversations that invite the listener, the seeker, the follower deeper into meaning, deeper into our humanity.

We speak of life being three dimensions and with movies we have seen how they are presented in 3D when we where special glasses. There are also now 4 Dimension movies with effects in the theatre and moving beyond into other special effects offering other dimensions of experience.

John’s gospel invites us to live with the expectation of a dimension of mystery, an awareness of sacred dimension of life.

Because not everything is understandable or explainable.

And so to introduce this dimension of mystery and life, John tells the story of the wedding - a celebration, a feast - and into that festive story introduces Jesus as the channel and provider of abundance. We might think of this story as a miracle - the water becomes wine - but for John this is a sign that points to Jesus and reveals who he is - fully divine and fully human.

We may have difficulty grasping and understanding that - but this is the Word made flesh and the Word is grace upon grace flowing and nourishing the gift of life. The story also echoes the expectation of messianic feast where the Messiah will be revealed and here we have Jesus' mother (never named Mary in this gospel) pointing out to the servants - not to the head table guests - that maybe Jesus could provide more wine.

There is a big part of me that wants more explanation about the chemistry of the story - but John is not worried about us understanding the how of the water into wine - but rather the why - the symbolic.

As one commentator says about this text:

“You may enjoy it. Swirl it in the glass. Sniff its delicate aroma. Sip it.
Swish it around in your mouth. Talk about its uniquely Johannine vintage.
Marvel at its rich, silky, smoky texture.
But, don't spit it out.”

Because this story prepares us for the gospel of John stories where we will experience a dimension of mystery that reminds that there is a sacredness of life that means we can't understand or explain or control all the details and experiences of life.

Come and See - with a set of scared glasses that enables us to be open to wonder, to ponder deep questions, to experience profound love and to wrestle with dilemmas of truth and to face disguises and glimpses of evil.

We don't ever hear that the Magi arrived home. The Epiphany truth invites us to keep walking, keep on the journey of faith and life. It is a constant journey - but every once in awhile we will stumble into a feast where there is such abundance of grace and love - that our thirst for hope is nourished so that we can keep walking and traveling toward home.

Come and See a dimension of mystery that reminds us and assures us that we are not alone. The God of Life - a God who is Holy Mystery and Wholly Love - invites us to bring a curiosity and wonder - not so that we can solve the mysteries of life, but so that we can fully experience them.

And you never know when the angels may be singing Hallelujah ...