

**Error! Reference source not found., Galena, Illinois
January 17, 2016**

**Sermon by The Rev. Gloria G. Hopewell, D.Min.
Texts: Isaiah 62: 1-5 John 2: 1-11**

I have to admit that I spent more time this week than I'm willing to reveal fantasizing about what I might do with the Powerball Lottery money. It wasn't easy. At this point in life, I'm unlikely to become a high roller or to jet set with the rich and famous. So, my little list came out like this: some personal things like paying off a mortgage, funding grandsons' college educations, maybe hosting a splendid family reunion for siblings and their children and grandchildren, some travel – and, oh yes, a new car. Then there was the list of other worthy causes. Establishing a foundation to fund worthy charities and arts organizations. At that point, my imagination failed. I just could not fathom mindfully spending that much money, even if it was split in half, or thirds.

It was a different kind of abundance in Cana that day. It's often called Jesus' first miracle in John's gospel – the turning of water into wine to save a family from the shame of running short at the wedding feast. And what wine it was – not only enough to save the day but copious quantities that could satisfy the whole town's thirst for days and days! And the best of wine – not the vin ordinaire that a peasant family would ordinarily serve!

Was it a miracle? Well, in a sense, I suppose. But John calls it a "sign." Something that signals that something more is going on. I mean, Jesus did not draw attention to what he did. He did not perform this sign in front of the bride and groom and the guests. No one but the servants who filled the jars with water – and the disciples, of course – had any idea what happened. Not even the wine steward who pronounced it to be of fine quality.

The first acts of Jesus in the other gospels are about teaching in the synagogue, healing, and exorcising demons. But John chooses this sign, the first of several, that show us what God is like. Through Jesus. Setting the tone for his gospel. It is the tone of abundant love and grace. Light and living water. Tastes and glimpses of God's realm – what it is that God wants for humanity. For *all* of humanity. The overflowing stone jars are one hint. The marriage feast itself is another – such a feast appears in both testaments as an image of what God's realm is like. It echoes our psalm today, "They feast upon the abundance of your house; you give them drink from the river of your delights."

Sometimes it doesn't seem like there are too many hints of this abundance and of God's realm. Between the incessant noise of the upcoming Iowa caucus – the debates and the commercials – it is endless finger pointing and gloom and doom. People in Rock Falls and Chicago were killed or driven from their homes due to fires set by arsonists. There were more shootings – but not the ones that draw national attention because they occurred in marginal neighborhoods. There is the horrible toxic water situation in Flint Michigan. And, if that was not enough, there was the Anglican Communion Primate's meeting in Canterbury this week that voted to apply "consequences" to The Episcopal Church for creating "a fundamental departure from the faith

and teaching" of the majority of Anglicans by approving same gender marriage last summer . The "consequences" specify that for three years, Episcopalians "no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies," and do not vote on doctrinal or polity decisions. It is unclear that the Primates or even the Archbishop of Canterbury have the authority to impose these consequences or how the Communion will proceed from here.

Granted, this news affects a relatively small portion of the population, but it was enough to get us in the major newspapers and NPR. And, that's not an everyday thing! Reactions have been all over the place, but our Presiding Bishop, the head of our House of Deputies, Bishop Lee and many others have affirmed that our General Convention decision will stand. That all people will continue to be welcome in our churches and permitted to receive the sacraments.

We have also been reminded that rather than being "naughty" or disobedient to the will of the Communion as a whole, perhaps we have been called to be prophetic. That we should not be surprised at this action – it has been threatened for years. And that prophets are not usually treated very well.

Prior to the vote, our new Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry addressed the primates. "Many of us have committed ourselves and our church," he said,

to being 'a house of prayer for all people,' as the Bible says, where all are truly welcome. Our commitment to be an inclusive church is not based on a social theory or capitulation to the ways of the culture, but on our belief that the outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross are a sign of the very love of God reaching out to us all. While I understand that many disagree with us, our decision regarding marriage is based on the belief that the words of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians are true for the church today: All who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, for all are one in Christ.

In a video statement after the meeting Bp. Curry talked about pain and disappointment and then said:

...it may be part of our vocation to help the Communion and to help many others to grow in a direction where we can realize and live the love that God has for all of us, and we can one day be a Church and a Communion where all of God's children are fully welcomed, where this is truly a house of prayer for all people. And maybe it's a part of our vocation to help that to happen. And so we must claim that high calling; claim the high calling of love and faith; love even for those with whom we disagree, and then continue, and that we will do, and we will do it together.

Vocation. Prophets. Do you suppose this is our job – that what Jesus showed us with his signs – with the tastes and glimpses of who God is and what God most wants for us is what we are to share with the world around us? That the abundant love and grace are what we must claim in our lives and share in the world around us? This weekend we celebrate one prophet, The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He was certainly doing so. He and so many others. And so must we. Such a vocation is the very essence of being a follower of Jesus!

Well, I did not win the Powerball lottery. It's no wonder. I never did get around to buying a ticket. But that's okay. The reports of life after a big win are not all glowing – between being hounded by everyone who wants a piece of the action, unscrupulous financial advisors, conflict in the family or circle of friends. Sounds like a lot of work. Besides, there is a better kind of abundance that is here just for our taking. The lasting abundance of the grace and love of Christ, the kind comes through those outstretched arms that encircle every one of us and that we are called to share. Because sharing it does not diminish how much we get. There is more than enough for us – for *all* of us.

Amen.