

Alexanderwohl Menn. Church

Epiphany 2

1/19/25

Luann Yutzky

Attributed to Martin Luther King, Jr.:

“Most gracious and all wise God, before whose face the generations rise and fall; Thou in whom we live, and move, and have our being. We thank thee [for] all of thy good and gracious gifts, for life and for health; for food and for raiment; for the beauties of nature and human nature. We come before thee painfully aware of our inadequacies and shortcomings. We realize that we stand surrounded with the mountains of love and we deliberately dwell in the valley of hate. We stand amid the forces of truth and deliberately lie. We are forever offered the high road and yet we choose to travel the low road. For these sins O God forgive. Break the spell of that which blinds our minds. Purify our hearts that we may see thee. O God in these turbulent days when fear and doubt are mounting high give us broad visions, penetrating eyes, and power of endurance. Help us to work with renewed vigor for a warless world, for a better distribution of wealth and for a brother/sisterhood that transcends race or color.”¹

For the prayers of the people here at Alexanderwohl, we ask God for your mercy and grace in the losses of people we love. Grief takes its time.

- We remember Nita and Steve and all of the family in the unexpected loss of their daughter Trenae this week.
- For the family of Tom Szambecki may you bring comfort as they feel the loss of Tom.
- We pray for strength and a full recovery for Matt Voth, for patience and support for the whole family, and we pray for continued healing for Lee Hertzler.
- We also pray for Jolynn Voth as she begins hospice, a new territory for her and the family. We pray for your comfort to surround her. We pray for strength and love for Kim and the family. May we be a community that is there for each other and care for the needs of each other.

Equip us with what we need to be agents of peace in the world in a time of leadership transition. For the new leadership in our country, may they have wisdom and care about the common good.

May we, the church be brave and centered as an example of joy as we follow Christ, the Prince of Peace.

In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray. Amen.

¹ <https://prayerandpolitiks.org/articles-essays-sermons/prayers-of-martin-luther-king-jr/>

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“Fill it to the Brim”

John 2:1-11

I wonder if you have heard the surgeon general's parting prescription for the country (that he loves) is how he put it. In his two terms as Surgeon General of the United States he has wrestled with the question of : “What are the deeper root causes of the pain and unhappiness that he has encountered so often across our country?” He goes on to say it is very urgent in answering this question because the status quo is harming our physical and mental health and contributing to the division and polarization around us. We are chasing after the wrong things. 1/3 of adults and half of young people are struggling with loneliness the Surgeon General says and have little or no sense of purpose or a meaningful life. And how can they when the voices we hear around us of what success is is that you need to get famous probably on social media, get rich, or be powerful.

After listening to many stories from people over the last four years he has come to see that there are three essential elements that fuel our fulfillment and well-being: relationships, service, and purpose.

His father told him that he never felt emptiness, you know that gnawing feeling that you're missing something until he left his farming village in rural India. In the village he hadn't had any running water or electricity and his family had very little food. What he did have was community and when his father's mother died when his father was 10, the village was there and cared for him and helped him grow up. They knew each other intimately in a way that many in this country do not know anymore.

If you've listened to people look back over their lives and talk about what was most important it often will come around to the people we loved, the people that we served and how we are able to touch their lives and those things give us meaning and purpose.

We have been chasing after the wrong things the Surgeon General says and it is affecting our wellbeing. He encouraged that we lift stories of purpose through music, movies, books, and sermons so that people will hear the message of valuing relationships, service and purpose and be inspired.²

I hope you hear that today. I hope you hear that we follow Jesus of Nazareth who celebrated people, who attended wedding parties, who is about sowing delight and nourishing wonder and we, as a church might

²<https://people.com/surgeon-general-vivek-murthy-americans-closing-letter-rethink-how-we-are-living-our-lives-exclusive-87701>
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have forgotten that. Oh and one more thing about Jesus, he had a very wise mother.

Weddings can be quite an ordeal today and probably back then with a week-long wedding feast. Can you imagine planning for the food and the drinks for a whole week? It could have been that people helped bring some of the food and wine. But, it was a crucial moment when the wine ran out and the wedding wasn't over. Mary, the wise mother notices this and nudges Jesus to do something about it. She knows he can and Jesus doesn't seem too happy to be interrupted. Maybe he just felt like he was there to celebrate, not to be put to work. Jesus says back to his mother that it's not mine to do right now and again Mary is a wise woman; she lived with him for a while now so she ignores him.

She tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them. and maybe that stirred something in Jesus. Mary's statement, "They have no wine," could infer what biblical scholar, John Roth calls the theodicy of protest where we call on God to act. There are implications to having no more wine in this situation. The hired help, the servants would be the ones to blame. Those who are serving others in this context would be low in the social standing and they could easily have their livelihood taken away or be even more severely punished. When they see the wine run out, they probably panicked.

Mary sees the situation and says, "There is no more wine. See them. See the situation," and something moves Jesus to compassion. Maybe he saw something new about who he was to be that he hadn't realized fully, an epiphany?

Jesus grows into becoming someone that is interrupted a lot. We read in the gospels often of, "While Jesus is doing this or going here something happens to interrupt." He couldn't even get away on a boat before the crowd found him. After this first miracle or sign of Jesus' glory as John says it, we see him responding to interruptions with grace upon grace and healing everyone's pain.

At the wedding, not many people realized it was Jesus who turned the water into fine wine except for the disciples and Mary. In the Gospel of John, the disciples are pretty quick to understand. The glory of Jesus is revealed and grasped pretty quickly.

If you notice too, the miracle of the new wine is contained in the old stone jars that were held specifically for the Jewish ritual of purification that held water to purify and Jesus is replacing that with who he is instead- a wine that bursts with flavor and joy and amazement. "This is who I am. The new life within you for you."

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Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. A God of abundance.

They filled it to the brim. It's thought to have been equivalent to 600 to 900 bottles of fine wine.

I can hear it too in here. "Well, that's a little extravagant." It also is a lesson for us in learning how to sow delight and nourish wonder. There are also hints of protest. God, do you see what is happening here? Do you see the people caught in the systems? Do you see how the wealthy rule the land? Do you see? We can nudge God too with protest.

What is stopping us from "filling it to the brim" with whatever we are doing? Whatever the ministries are that we are involved in, could that be a question for us this year as we meet with our committees and boards: How could we fill it to the brim? How could we be sowing delight and nourishing wonder this year? How could we protest injustice around us with joy?

How do we celebrate people and really see them when all they know is being ostracized and judgment? I wonder what would happen in this year if instead of trying to not spend one more penny than we think we should, we fill something to the brim like Jesus did and gave the best wine at the end when it usually wasn't the greatest stuff.

In so doing that, the servants breathed a sigh of relief for not getting called out.

One objective of the Gospel of John is to show evidence for what it says in the first chapter, verse 14 and that is: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory." The signs of Jesus according to the Gospel of John are needed in the world and seeing the signs will lead to belief. I hope that you hear this morning that these signs are not only seen in prosperity. As the Surgeon General said we have been giving dangerous messages about success and prosperity that have led to despair and loneliness.

The signs of Jesus being evident as the Word who moved into our neighborhood are seen in fractured communities just as much as anywhere. Jesus moves into the neighborhoods of the poor and oppressed. Our well-being depends on each other. Your well-being affects my well-being. If you don't have what you need how can I not care about that?

Martin Luther King, Jr. says it this way: "The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people."

Are we chasing after the wrong things? Will we stand up even in front of God incarnate, God In the Flesh, and say, "They have no more wine. See the situation. They need help! Will we stand with Mary in protest and believe?"

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Will we drink from the “river of your delights” as it says in Psalm 36:8 as we said in our call to worship? Can we choose to look at the world this way? Can we sow delight and wonder? Are we as a church able to do that? Do we remember that we follow Jesus the one who went to wedding parties and saw the needs around him as he grew in his mission and purpose and ultimately gave his life?

Music brings us joy and is an integral part of worship here at Alexanderwohl. I remember when the Bethel College Choir came to sing here in November and the morning was filled with joyful music and I heard a lot of people say, “That is just what we needed right now.” It lifted our spirits. We could take that one step further in anything we do. When we experience joy; we could say, “How could I pass that joy on to someone else that doesn't have the resources or ability to experience what I just experienced?”

We are creative people; we can think of something.

Toward the end of the Gospel of John it says in chapter 20:31:

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

That we all may have life.

May it be so.