

I Will Not Keep Silent
Sermon: Epiphany 2C
January 17, 2016

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[Isaiah 62:1-5](#)
[Psalm 36:5-10](#)
[1 Corinthians 12:1-11](#)
[John 2:1-11](#)

There is no such thing as a coincidence; only the Holy Spirit acting in disguise. This has been proven to me once again with today's assigned scripture readings in relation to the news this week coming out of Canterbury, England and the Anglican Primates' meeting. The Anglican Communion's highest bishops along with the Archbishop of Canterbury issued a statement listing the consequences of the Episcopal Church's decision to approve same-sex marriage and support the rights of LGBTQ people, while also expressing a strong desire to remain in relationship. Basically, we have lost our representation on international councils for three years. If you are interested in the finer points, I've printed out the original communication¹ and then the responses from our Presiding Bishop², the President of the House of Bishops³, and our own diocesan bishop⁴ and will hand them out to those interested at the end of the service.

As only the Holy Spirit would have it, today's readings are all about marriage and committed relationships in community. Using marital language to describe God's relationship with humanity is prevalent throughout the bible. The term "bride" or "wife" is used 454 times and "husband" or "bridegroom" is used 206 times. Feminine matrimonial language is much more prevalent because it's used as a metaphor for the land or people of Israel.

Today, we first hear from Isaiah. In the Hebrew Bible, marriage was one symbol for the covenant between God, the Israelites, and the land. The prophet Hosea used the language of marriage extensively, and Isaiah is picking up on that today. This beautiful, poetic passage talks about God's constancy, dedication, protection, and rejoicing over the restoration of the land and reunification of God's people after their exile. It's an ode to the Covenant God first made with Abraham. And the focus here is

¹ <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2016/01/15/anglican-primates-meeting-issues-communique/>

² <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2016/01/15/presiding-bishop-and-primate-speaks-on-actions-at-primates-meeting/>

³ <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2016/01/15/on-the-primates-meeting-a-letter-from-the-house-of-deputies-president/>

⁴ <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2016/01/15/bishop-of-california-makes-statement-on-primates-meeting/>

on God's role, God's character, not the Israelites', because they had in fact failed numerous times to follow God's commandments. Despite the people repeatedly missing the boat on what it meant to follow God's ways, God is faithful, God's sole desire is to create unity and instill love. "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." This reference to the young man marrying a young woman is an example of a committed relationship, not a definition. That line is meant to describe, not prescribe. It is not a commandment; it's one illustration of fidelity.

The metaphorical language of marriage used in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe our relationship with God is carried over into the New Testament. John's gospel sets Jesus' first miracle within the context of marriage – a ritual that binds people into relationship, a covenant relationship. The story of the marriage at Cana is only found in John's gospel and it's commonly referred to as Jesus's first miracle, although the text calls it a sign. Now, it may very well have happened – Jesus may have literally turned water into wine. I think anything is truly possible with God. But let's consider the alternative – that this event was not so much a miracle, as it was a parable John's community told to illustrate their primary notion of God's action in the world through Christ.

We're told there are 6 stone jars, holding 20-30 gallons each, used for the Jewish rites of purification. Guests to the wedding would have first washed themselves before joining the festivities; a necessary ritual for inclusion. So what does Jesus do as his first sign? He takes that purification practice and doesn't abolish it, but he transforms it. He turns those jars that had been reminders of humanity's separation, and turns them into the means of rejoicing and delight in community. Coming close to God is not about empty rituals, but joyful relationship.

This is what Jesus does and more than that, this is what Jesus is. We know this because of one extra detail, one small critical detail that John includes: the first words of the story say that this all happened on the "third day." The wedding in Cana happens on the third day. There is no contextual reason for this detail – it doesn't tie in with what came before or after. It is not a literal reference to when the story is taking place. Instead, it's alluding to the past and the future. First the past: John is more than likely reminding his community of Jewish Christians of the book of Exodus when Moses and the Israelites were encountering God in the midst of their exile.

The Lord said to Moses: 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and prepare for the third day, because on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. (Ex. 19:10-13)

The third day was when the Israelites would meet God in smoke and clouds, thunder and trumpets, at Mt. Sinai. But in order to do this, they would first need to purify themselves. This practice of purification in order to encounter God became critical to the Hebrew people for centuries. But in Jesus' first sign at this wedding in Cana, when he reveals his glory, his primary purpose, he transforms the ritual of purification into a sign of rejoicing in relationship.

So John is giving new meaning to a story from the Hebrew Scriptures when he mentions the third day, but he's also pointing forward to Jesus' death and resurrection. John's community knew that the third day was when Jesus rose from the dead. On that day, he transformed once and for all, oppression and death – anything that separates us

from God. This sign on the third day at the wedding in Cana signified the difference Christ made then and now.

We are called to turn our stone jars – be it our church institutions, our families, our businesses, or our hearts of stone into living vessels for rejoicing and unity. Our practices should not be about barriers or deciding who’s clean or unclean, who’s in or who’s out. Jesus’ first and last signs, in the wine and in his blood, were about unity. That’s the cup we share in the Eucharist.

And just to drive home today’s message about inclusion, we have Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. This was Paul’s response to there being conflict over whose skills, gifts, and talents were most important. This early Christian community in Corinth had been arguing about which skills were valid and authorized. And Paul says, stop it! They’re all important and all necessary! Every gift comes from the Spirit and there’s a huge variety of gifts. And not only are there different gifts, but they’re all to be used for the common good. Our differences are gifts from God and they’re to be welcomed as part of and necessary for the whole community to thrive.

In the end, I don’t need to argue for the full inclusion of LGBTQ people in the Episcopal Church. Our scriptures clearly do that today, and our church councils have already done that in July of last year when they voted on the canonical change to eliminate language defining marriage as between a man and a woman ([Resolution A036](#)) and authorized two new marriage rites with language allowing them to be used by same-sex or opposite-sex couples ([Resolution A054](#)).⁵

I’m proud and I hope you’re also proud to be an Episcopalian this week. We readily accept the consequences the Anglican Communion has put upon us and see them as an invitation to keep preaching this gospel of welcoming the outsider, to not remain silent as Isaiah says today. We all share in this mission of inclusion, of noticing who’s being left out and inviting them to God’s marriage banquet of joy and community. Inclusion for LGBTQ people may be your mission, too, or maybe it’s the Black Lives Matter movement, or the homeless in Marin, or people in foster care or without healthcare, or maybe it’s cantankerous uncle Hal who’s been ostracized from your family. Please, pray to God, ask where you’re being invited to carry on Jesus’ mission of reconciling love and transformation. Don’t remain silent. What place in the world, or our community, or our families, or our hearts need to be transformed from an instrument of exclusion to an instrument of welcome and delight?

⁵ Sharon Sheridan, *General Convention Approves Marriage Equality*; Episcopal News Service, July 1, 2015. <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2015/07/01/general-convention-approves-marriage-equality/> accessed 1/16/15