

Isaiah 62:1-5

62For 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.

John 2:1-11

2On 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.

"Do Whatever He Tells You"

I guess some things are universal, like a mother's influence over a son. Jesus is the Son of God, but when his mom hints that he do something, and even though he protests, he ends up doing it, doesn't he? And it's not just his own mom that seems to exercise such influence over Jesus; you may remember the story of the poor Syro-Phoenician woman pleading for her daughter to be healed, and Jesus is reluctant to comply here as well, but after a short discussion Jesus is persuaded to heal this woman's daughter.

And these women deserve a lot of credit for prompting Jesus to do something that he at first seems reluctant to do. Most of us have that problem when Jesus wants us to do something. Today I want to encourage you to "Do whatever he tells you," as Mary instructed the servants in today's Gospel passage. And let's face it; that's not an easy feat because so often what Jesus tells us to do seems absurd. But unless we "do whatever he tells us to do," we won't see his amazing acts. Today I pray that we would be able to get past the absurdity of what Jesus may tell us to do so that we can not only see what he is doing but we can participate in what he is doing.

Let's think about the time Jesus fed the 5000 in the wilderness. Imagine how dumbfounded the disciples must have been when, looking out over a crowd of 5,000 plus and holding a couple fish a couple loaves of bread, and Jesus says, "Go ahead and feed them." That's like having a shopping bag on the pitcher's mound of the ballpark up in Saint George, handing out items to your co-disciples and saying, "Okay, you heard what he said; let's feed em." Our common sense tells us that this is a futile endeavor that shouldn't even be attempted. Same thing must have occurred in today's story; Jesus tells the servants to fill a bunch of jars, which usually held water used for cleaning people's feet, with water. That's no problem; they do it. But here's the funny thing. He tells a servant to take a little of that foot water, put it in a cup, and serve it to the wine steward. Was this some kind of a joke? I'll bet all the other servants were glad that Jesus hadn't picked them to serve the steward, because if it was still foot water in those cisterns, that servant who served the steward would probably not be working for his master much longer. He might not be living that much longer. Our tendency would be to say, "I'm sorry, Mr. Jesus, but I just can't do that."

But we should commend the disciples and this servant for actually following through with Jesus' commands, for defying "common sense" and taking a chance by doing the absurd, because, you see, without their compliance, nothing would have happened. If disciples had told Jesus to go fly a kite when he told them to feed a crowd with a few loaves and fish, the crowd would have disbursed, and the disciples would most likely not be disciples anymore, and rumors would go around that Jesus was crazy. If the servants had not followed Jesus instructions at the wedding, the party would have ended, the guests would go home, the host would be embarrassed, and that would have been all. But look what the result of these acts of faith is, even a reluctant faith? Miracles happen! So the first thing that we should note is that for miracles to occur, *we need to do something*. God doesn't just say, "Stand back and I'll take care of this." No, the wonderful truth is that he partners with us in performing miracles, and because we are partners, we have a part to play in the miracle process.

And when we play our part, which simply means that we do whatever he tells us to do, we witness miracles...at the risk of sounding redundant I would say that we witness miraculous miracles. We see God go *beyond* simply fixing a problem; God fixes things the way that only God can fix them – most excellently. Today's Gospel passage says that Jesus not only changed toilet water into wine; he changed it into *the best* wine imaginable. And he didn't just create *enough* wine: he created *an abundance of wine*. Likewise when the disciples distributed bread and fish to the crowds, the people were not just fed; they were *filled, and the leftovers exceeded what was initially served*.

This is the struggle we so often face, isn't it? It's a struggle of faith, faith that tells us that the outcome can be different from what we've come to expect, faith that the wine will not run out, faith the hungry masses will be fed. The struggle is one of faith in God's providence. We just don't see the possibility, and so we don't even attempt to place our faith in God. Instead we place our trust in ourselves and we handle problems according to our own abilities. We notice that the wine has run out, and we leave the party, or if we're the host we apologize and send everyone home, then we live with the embarrassment. If we see a crowd of hungry people we advise them to look for a soup kitchen or food pantry and we move along, perhaps offering up a quick prayer as we walk away.

Or perhaps we respond in faith. Has this happened to you? Someone begs you for some food or money, and you give them something instead of ignoring them and walking away? Someone calls you on the phone with a crisis just as you were going out to a movie, and you stay and talk to them, even though you end up missing the movie? Or instead of taking that resort vacation you decide to go on a one-week mission trip to dwell among the poor and tend to their needs? Or you decide to spend your free time at a rally showing solidarity with your neighbors and in opposition to discriminatory policies (sorry, I got political again). All these are simple acts of faith, faith that God is able to do something amazing *through you*.

And while you may say to yourself that what you do doesn't make much of a difference – there are a lot of hungry, needy, oppressed, downtrodden, misunderstood people in this world – it *does* make a difference. Kindness is contagious. Good works inspire other good works, and little by little we see changes. We live in a culture that has grown accustomed to instant gratification. I think this is why there's such a drug epidemic on Staten Island; people want to feel high as quickly as possible as often as possible, and drugs enable them to do that. But ultimately the drug problem indicates that people have lost faith; they see the problems around them and want to escape those problems rather than confront them *in faith, with the belief that they can make a positive difference in the world, that they can be agents of change*.

Change doesn't always occur quickly – sometimes it takes time. Our Old Testament lesson is an example of that. God, speaking through Isaiah to a handful of Jews just arriving at a blown up city with a demolished temple, says, "This is gonna change dramatically. You'll be vindicated and this city will be rebuilt," and it happened, not as quickly turned jars of water into wine, but it happened in a short span of time relatively speaking, and it happened by way of the blood and sweat and tears and toil of that handful of Jews who were determined to "do whatever" God told them to do.

You know, just because we put in a lot of time and energy into an endeavor doesn't mean it's not a miracle, because all the ingredients of a miracle are still there: Did the problem look unsurmountable? Yes. Did you act in faith? Yes. Did you notice a positive change? Yes. Would the same result occur if you hadn't taken any action? No. We are the vehicles by which miracles occur, and so our participation is essential.

We have been involved in miracles throughout our lives and throughout history. I believe that the reason we live in a free nation that affords us the opportunity to vote and relocate and choose our professions and protest what we don't agree with is because throughout history there have been people who "did whatever Jesus told them to do." Jesus told MLK not to give up on his campaign for civil rights, not to just "let the courts" deal with it, because he saw a disconnect between the world as it was and the world as it should be, and in faith he "did what Jesus told him to do," so that forty years after his death an African American is elected to the highest office in our government. I know there's a lot of chaos out there, terrorists, serial killers, environmental hazards, rapists to name a few. At times the challenges to Kingdom building seem overwhelming, that it would take a miracle to change things, and that's exactly what we believe in.

Here in this season of Epiphany, we see Jesus as the best example of a person (yes, Jesus was human as well as divine) whose entire life was an act of faith, and his impact is still felt today, in this world and in our lives. Jesus did some things that seemed insane, and look what has been the result. Now there are millions of us who do things that seem insane, because we are taught to do “whatever he tells us to do.” Miracles big and small occur because we listen and because we obey. Individual souls are saved and entire nations are freed. One miracle story that rings in my memory is that of Julie Columbino, who, after learning about the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, took a flight to Port au Prince and began helping the Red Cross with the thousands of injured people needing medical help. A month later she resigned from her job in Florida, liquidated her assets and took her life saving of \$7000 to Haiti to help the people. “I know it sounds lofty,” she said, “but the truth is that I was just called to it.” Now, six years later, they’re a \$300,000 company that employs between 20 and 40 Haitians paying them a decent salary and allowing them to provide for their families. And to think none of that would have happened if Julie Columbino had not “answered the call” and “done what Jesus told her to do.”

I don’t know if you have a story like Julie’s but I pray that you have a story like it, a story about feeling called to do something that seemed crazy and just doing it, because you just had that sneaky suspicion that it was God calling you to do it.

May God grant us all the faith to do “do whatever Jesus tells us.”