

Pastor Roy's Sermon from January 20, 2013

Isaiah 62:1-5, Psalm 36:5-10; I Corinthians 12:1-11, John 2:1-11

When was the last time you were surprised by wonder? Sometimes it's a big thing like a surprise birthday party at age 16. Sometimes it's a little thing like a vine wrapping around a tree so that when I pulled it off, you could see where it had been. It's as if the tree said, "Thank you."

Isaiah the prophet speaks words of surprise and amazement to Israel: You shall be given (by God) a new name.

Not Forsaken or Desolate but Delight. Surrounded by friends and family. You will be given the beautiful crown of joy—the pleasure of rejoicing.

Israel will be surprised by Grace. Where the end was assumed, a new beginning is found.

If God were to give you a new name, what would it be? We name our own identities to ourselves and sometimes they are negative identities which pull us down. Which keep us from living the true identity which the Spirit breaths upon us. In prayer Isaiah discovered these new identities for Israel. In prayer we discover our own true identity. When we think of ourselves in a certain way, we can ask, "Is that who I am in view of eternity?" Is that the name God has given me? Or am accepting a name that is untruthful. God grants gracious names and invites us to live into them.

Paul speaks of confessing that Jesus is Lord. What does it mean to confess that Jesus is Lord? What can it mean?

Surely it's not just something we say? Perhaps confessing that Jesus is Lord means to have a new orientation toward life—a renewed identity?

Paul assumes that those who confess Christ as Lord will also accept the gifts of the Spirit of Christ and use them. The gifts of the Spirit are God's grace working in our experience. A renewed identity of grace and belovedness. Do you think of yourself as God's beloved. All whom God creates, God loves with abandon—without concern for cost or response. Freely and amazingly. Each moment, each day.

Then we come Jesus at a local wedding feast with some of his disciples.

This story suggests what a gracious new identity, what the gifts of the Spirit look, smell, and taste like. Mary and the head waiter are the important characters besides Jesus. We tend to get a big charge out of the miracleness of this wedding moment. It's not what Jesus does, it's how Jesus does it.

The action between Mary and Jesus show us that sometimes we aren't sure what to do in a situation. "Should I get involved?" Do I need to help? Isn't there someone else who will do this instead of me?

Jesus' words, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." Mary says, "Just do whatever he tells you." Perhaps a brief and a smile, and ten, "Fill the jars with water. Take some to the head waiter."

From embarrassment to an unexpected blessing of extra wine. Depending on how much water they

bothered to put in the very large jars, they would have probably had wine to sell at the end of the feast.

Is this not the nature of grace, even when we're not sure what we're doing or why we're doing it? The steward is shocked at how the bride groom saved the good stuff for last. These people have been partying for a couple of days. Kind of a waste to serve good wine to people who won't appreciate it!

Abundant grace is something great when you expect nothing at all. Not only quality, but quantity.

God loves with abandon even those who don't appreciate it or notice. Priceless beauty freely given. We see it in the beauty of creation, like the frozen rain on the trees this past week, or daily sunrises and sunsets. The wild animals eating freely.

We wake up and move through the day, expecting nothing spectacular and God meets us with amazing, free grace. Do we notice?

We're expecting the common, same old thing, and something wonderful happens instead. Or maybe simply surviving the day is a good enough point of grace.

God's grace is intentionally wasteful!

Eternity does not calculate. Our notions of worthiness are far from the Spirit of God who grants lavishly.

God loves us (and all the other plants and creatures) and pours out grace on us just because we are.

God's mercy is free and unending. The challenge to us to appreciate it for what it is and then live our lives accordingly. The Spirit freely gives gifts. Will we share them and develop them within ourselves?

This week, let us remember Isaiah's new identity for Israel, and Jesus' sign at a wedding of freely given good stuff. Here are the gifts of the Spirit.

May God make us mindful of the freely abundant grace all around us. This is the reign of God. It fills us within and surrounds us no matter what. Let us breath it in, and sing it out! Amen.