

Isaiah 62:1-5

62 For 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.
2 The 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.
3 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
4 You shall no more be termed Forsaken,^[a]
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;^[b]
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,^[c]
and your land Married;^[d]
for the Lord delights in you,
and your land shall be married.
5 For as a young man marries a young woman,
so shall your builder^[e] marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.

Psalms 36:5-10

5 Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.
6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your judgments are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.
7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
8 They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
9 For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.
10 O continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your salvation to the upright of heart!

John 2:1-11

2 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. **2** Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. **3** When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." **4** And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." **5** His

mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it.⁹ When 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 ¹⁰ and 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."¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Here, early in the year, we're seeking an understanding of God's mission for us at this pivotal time in our lives as a community. Last week, we heard that we're children of God, commissioned to carry on God's legacy of transformation. This carries us into the future close to the heart of God and commissioned to become more like God,

to find repentance and transformation for ourselves and for the world. Our focus today is on what God intends for us in our future, on the ways God seeks to partner with us in the emerging kingdom of God, in the appearance of God's blessing.

Transformation lies at the heart of today's passages as well, and especially in John where Jesus transforms water into wine to celebrate a wedding. After one sip, the steward calls to the groom and declares, "You've kept the good wine until now." This is a story of transformation from ordinary to extraordinary, of dirty water to wondrous wine. It's a story of purpose and repurposing.

Here's thing about wine. You can't have wine without water. Think about the standard production of this drink. In a normal circumstance, grapes grow full of water filled with sugars and nutrients from the vine, and then a winepress squeezes this water-based juice out of the grapes. That

liquid, fermented over a long period of time, eventually becomes wine. Why's this important? Notice that Jesus doesn't turn a stone into a pony, or pork rinds into pure gold medallions. Water belongs in wine. It's a necessary part of the drink! Of course, this moment is undoubtedly a miracle because this was an instantaneous transformation instead of this long process of growth, development, harvesting, pressing, and fermentation. In this flash of a change, though, what we find is that God repurposes that water for a new future as wine.

Here's another thing about making wine, especially in the ancient world. While totally sanitary, it's not exactly an appetizing process. Though various types of winepresses existed, the practice of stomping out the juice from grapes was still a common practice in the ancient Roman empire. Of course, you would clean your feet to remove all the grime so that no unintentional **additives** would, well,

contaminate the wine, but still! There's something about knowing someone's feet have been in my drink that's just...blurgh. Just not a process I'm fond of exploring. Yet, no matter how grimy the process might feel, it produces something deliciously necessary, because water on it's own in the ancient world was often not fit to drink. Viruses, bacteria, and other pollutants made the water dangerous. Without a consistent and reliable purification system, the alcohol content in wine would kill these contaminants and provide a safer source of sustenance to Jews, Romans, and others in the ancient world.

Wine's not only meant for safety, though. Good wine in the Bible is meant for a party. In John, wine appears as a way to express joy at this new creation of marriage that Jesus witnesses. You seen, wine played a central role in Jewish festivals. A traditional Passover seder includes a prescription of drinking four glasses of wine! Weddings, other

life passages, and every festival included wine as a sign of God's blessing because, under normal circumstances, making wine takes time and isn't cheap. Wine assumes some resources, some stability in your land, some time to grow and tend grapes, then harvest and press them, then ferment the wine before finally serving it. Wine in scripture is a sign of blessing.

That's what makes Jesus' move so miraculous. Jesus instantly turns normalcy into surprising blessing. In the blink of an eye, **Jesus takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary.** And this water came not just from any source, but from the jars used for ritual hand washing. Water from these jars would have more than potential bacterium floating around in there. It's that these containers aren't meant for consumption in the first place! When Jesus sends these servants to fill these jars, he basically tells them to fill up the dirty sinks with grody water. This stuff, the regular water, from

a regular sink, becomes the best wine at the party simply at the word of Jesus.

What if Jesus wants to transform us in this way? What if Jesus wants to make us, like wine, a sign of God's blessing? What if God wants to make us, like wine, symbol of the celebration of God's presence? What if God wants to take our ordinary and make it extraordinary? There's a wedding going on, a party to celebrate the union of Creator with creation, of Jesus and the church, of Israel with her God, of the bridegroom with the bride, and God intends us to be a sign of care, of joy, of health for God's kingdom.

Like the water that becomes wine, our participation in God's future requires a change within us. It requires the eradication of all the stuff, the disease and the bacteria and the viruses of sin that endanger life in God's kingdom. Some stuff in us needs to die. That's God's work, and part of the miracle we experience in baptism and in communion.

When we come into contact with God, with the Holy Spirit in Baptism and with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus through the bread and wine of communion, through that contact the deathly stuff within us dies. Death cannot stand in light of God's powerful life, and so the image of God within us rises to new life.

One thing we must realize about this is that, like the water in wine, we're a necessary part of God's plan for this future. We as the church live as a component part for God's mission in the world, and we thrive when that becomes a core part of our active identity. As our ELCA mission statement says, it is our hands that do God's work here in the world. Perhaps the best way to say it is that the ordinary is necessary for the extra**ordinary**. The change God intends to bring us necessarily includes our core identities.

What does this mean? What kind of future might God intend for us that uses our core identity but transforms it for the future?

It means that while we're no longer the water that we once were, our core identity as children of God carries through into the new creation God's bringing into the world. The future God has in store for us is **for us**, not someone else. God's miracle isn't an act of alchemy, but an act of compassionate restoration of who God created us to be in the first place.

In other words, how might God take the ordinary things that we care about and transform them into acts of compassion, celebration, and sustenance for the world God's creating? Our mission statement, *a fellowship living and sharing the love of God through worship, service, wellness, and hospitality*, gives us a context in which to imagine this future, to see visions shaped by the Holy Spirit

alive and amongst us, to dream dreams informed by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

Some of this has already borne fruit. Our commitment to wellness, for instance, brings semi-annual services of prayer for healing, bi-monthly gatherings of Across the Spectrum, a monthly diabetes support group, and two weekly yoga classes. This means that there are dozens of people otherwise unconnected with CLC who taste the goodness God has to offer, who see a vision for wellness inspired by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's ordinary becoming extraordinary.

Our commitment to service bubbled over into the development of Highlander Lutherans and the Rough Draught Coffee House, inspires us to collect items for Lutheran World Relief, Beans and Rice, and the Women's Resource Center, and participate in Operation Inasmuch. Starting next week, this sends me into the classroom at

NRCC to help teach students about the religions of the world and let them know there's a church in Radford committed to their well being, no matter their religion! This development of compassionate relationships helps our community to know that we're committed to making the NRV more truly reflect God's kingdom and God's will for God's people. That's ordinary becoming extraordinary.

These examples of God's work amongst us, of how God turned us into the wine that helps the world taste the joyful future God has in store, are things to celebrate. But we can't remain complacent with them. There's much yet to be done. There's two areas in particular that require are focus.

In our commitment to hospitality, we need to rally together to finish restoring this building so that other community members and ministries can use it for the good of the people in our area. That's going to require time and

energy and resources from us. That's why I'm asking you, every one, to contribute in some way to this Care4CLC opportunity on Wednesday January 27th. Come any time between 4pm-8pm to help out around the church. There are ways for everyone of every ability to contribute. There's painting and sorting and archiving that will help us make this space a true place of hospitality for all who enter. We need food to eat and hands to clean dust and good people to keep us company. Coming together, we can together more actively embrace our commitment to hospitality.

One last way that God might be leading us to become extraordinary is in our worship life. There's lots of ways we could talk about this, as far as participation or styles or even starting our second service on February 14th, which we are doing with great joy and excitement, but just as Jesus tells the servants to take the wine to the steward, we need to share this wine with others. We've a great gift to offer, and

as a fellowship living the love of Christ together, we need to become more active in **sharing** that love, sharing those opportunities, as our mission statement says. We've talked at length this morning about how to get more involved in the community outside of CLC, and that's excellent, but part of Jesus' commission to share the Gospel is to share the love and life of a church community in service and worship. So we've got a commission to invite others to become a part of this community, to share the love of Christ here at Christ. This means getting out of our comfort zones and inviting people to become a part of the movement God's doing here, making the ordinary extraordinary.

One of the reasons that I do sermon and other prep work out in the community is that it helps me to build relationships. Over in Christiansburg last week, I had an epiphany, and during the epiphany season, no less! I think there's a better way to invite people. We often say things

like, “why don’t you join us at church sometime?” That’s good, but it’s passive. Instead, why don’t we look at the persons gifts, talents, abilities, and perspectives, and say something like, “You have a clear gift for organizing, and your values really match some of the passions of our church community. I think you would make a great addition and that we’d work really well together. Why don’t you join us some Sunday to meet some of our people?” Almost like a college recruiter, this takes an intentional look at the people and the community, and tries to match them for God’s purposes.

So, here at the end, we have a challenge to transformation, and therefore, a few questions to consider: What ordinary things might God be making extraordinary? Here at CLC? In your own life? What kind of surprising transformation do you want to see Jesus working? How might we be a part of that? What water do we have that

might turn into the wine of God's blessing for the New River Valley?

This process, like stomping the juice out of grapes, will not always be the prettiest or most appetizing. But coming together, out of the ordinary grapes and ordinary feet that we bring, God is working to make an extraordinary future for us together. I pray this conversation proves useful to that end, and that the grace of God works extraordinary things in all of our lives, to Gods' glory. Amen.