Jan. 20, 2019

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (C),

Isa 62:1-5; Ps 96:1-3, 7-10; 1 Cor 12:4-11; John 2:1-11

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The beginning of the year is a time to make resolutions to improve one’s life - less food, more exercise, etc. How many of us ever make resolutions that focus on our world? How many resolve to work toward less contention, more service to others, etc.? The readings for this Sunday all point toward the transformation of the world. Let us not be fooled by the romanticism of bridal imagery. The bridal imagery simply characterizes the newness and hope that now lies open before us as a result of our commitment. The challenge here is fierce and demanding.

The reading from Isaiah is a promise of salvation. Zion/Jerusalem is no longer in distress. This is a newly formed people, with a new name. No longer ‘Forsaken’ or Desolate,’ but ‘my Delight,’ ‘Espoused.’ This is the promise that God makes to us and through us to others at the beginning of 2019. The desolate of the world, the dispossessed and the vulnerable have reason to hope because, according to the prophet – whether that is an ancient prophet or a contemporary prophet - salvation is at hand. And when it finally comes, the new life that all will experience will be as joyous as a wedding celebration, a time of deep love and great promise.

How will this salvation come about? As the gift of God so often comes - through others, through you and through me. Through our willingness to live simply so that others can simply live; to stand in solidarity with those caught in the torturous shifting of mercurial social movements; to support those who carry heavy burdens of loss or grief or despair. When we learn to live like this, it will be truly joyous, as a wedding celebration. This is the joy that is at the heart of the psalm response. There we read that it is God’s salvation, God’s ‘wondrous deeds.’ The hopes and dreams of a bridal couple, as profound and genuine as they might be, are merely a flicker of the hopes and dreams that God has for us all. Even the Gospel story of the wedding feast shows that while the union of the bridal couple suggests newness and promise, the astounding sign of new wine is evidence of Jesus’ ability to create authentic newness, not simply more of the same.

This brings us back to our New Year resolutions. Do we really want a new world? ‘A kinder, gentler nation’? Closer, more devoted families? A cleaner, healthier Earth? A church that better resembles the Body of Christ? Or are we more concerned with ourselves? Our comfort? Our image? Our own national prosperity and safety? At times we might think that transformation of our world is an impossible task. At such times we should look at the
Corinthian Christians. That church was contentious, engaged in internal culture struggles. In today’s reading Paul calls on them to employ their rich yet diverse abilities for the benefit of the entire body, not merely for themselves. It is a good message for today. We all have gifts through which God can bring salvation or transformation to our world. Are we going to allow God to work through us? Is ‘New’ Year simply a chronological concept? Or is it kairós, in the eschatological sense?

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