Isaiah 62:1-5

Psalm 36:5-10

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11

In each Gospel, the first reported act of Jesus’ public ministry, provides an important clue about who Jesus is for that particular author. For Matthew, it was the Sermon on the Mount: Jesus’ proclamation that the kingdom of God has come near. For Mark, it was an exorcism: Jesus has power over the forces of darkness. For Luke, it was Jesus’ return to his hometown, where he was not accepted by those who knew him best. And for John, Jesus’ first public act was turning water into wine – and not just a bottle or two, but 6 stone jars – containing 20 to 30 gallons each. John wants his readers to experience Jesus as a sign - a sign of God’s abundant love – poured forth – overflowing.

In John’s Gospel, the miracles that Jesus performs are never called miracles. They are called signs. And these signs are not really what we are supposed to focus on, no matter how miraculous they might seem. We are called to look beyond the signs, beyond the obvious, beyond the everyday, to something much more important; for signs point to a new and different reality. A stop sign has more meaning than its shape. A pointed finger directs us beyond the hand. Bread blessed and broken signifies more than just a basic meal.

Jesus’ signs in the Gospel of John don’t tell us what abundant grace is, but rather prod us to use our imagination, our intuition, our insight to interpret these signs. Thus turning water into wine can reveal to us what abundant grace is all about: not only is it good wine, but there is lots of it, and it is served when least expected.

It’s one thing to say, “Jesus is the source of grace” – even abundant grace. But it is quite another thing to have an experience of it. Have you ever had an experience of abundant grace? Have you ever experienced overwhelming joy and happiness that just came out of the blue, for no particular reason? Have you ever sensed a broad and deep acceptance of who you are and where you are? Have you ever seen the light, heard the voice, felt the presence? All of these are epiphanies – moments of grace – unexpected, unearned, undeserved. All of these are moments when our faith is sustained beyond human reasoning, beyond human comprehension. All of these are moments when we experience first-hand “the radiance of Christ’s glory.” (opening collect)

This season after Epiphany is all about perceptions, manifestations, revelations about who Jesus is.

The Gospel of John presents to us a revelation of Jesus not only as a sign of God’s abundant love, but also as a sign of God’s eternal creative force: In the beginning was the Word and the Word as with God and the Word was God…Through him all things were made; (Jn 1:1-3). John’s Gospel also emphasizes the fact that we are the focus of God’s creative Word: “For God so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

So what might this story about an ancient wedding in Cana reveal to us about Jesus? about his relationship with us? about our relationship with God? There is certainly the revelation that God can do surprising things – water becomes wine. How has God surprised you? There is also the manifestation of concern for the needs of others. Mary saying, “They have no wine.” How many times have the needs of others been pointed out to you? And there is Mary’s follow-up words to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” How often do you hear this call to act like a faith-filled follower of Jesus? Then there are the final words of today’s Gospel reading: Jesus “revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.” How has Jesus revealed his glory to you? What are the epiphanies, the revelations, the sudden intuitive insights that you experienced? How have they challenged your faith in Jesus?

A story: I was walking back to my car after a funeral at All Souls in Point Loma, where I was serving as deacon. I had parked on the street, a couple of blocks away from the church because the crowd for the funeral was expected to be large, and the parking lot is not very big. As I was walking, I encountered a fellow who was distributing leaflets door to door. I am not one to ignore someone passing me on the sidewalk, so I said “hello.” The fellow responded and asked if I had just come from a wedding. It was early Saturday afternoon, and I was wearing my clerical collar, so that seemed liked a reasonable assumption. No, I said, just the opposite, I was coming from a funeral. At that point my casual hello took a surprising turn, for the fellow said to me that his current girlfriend was killing him.

I was just walking down the street, just trying to be friendly, and now this fellow seemingly wanted to enter into a pastoral counseling session – right then and there. That’s not where I had expected the greeting to take us. But that was my expectation and not necessarily his. It ended up that the fellow did not want counseling, but just wanted to share that in spite of the death-dealing relationship with his girlfriend, he had hope because he knew Jesus. Even though he felt as if he were in an out-of-control situation, he continued to be buoyed by a faith that transcended the immediate threat. Even though all signs pointed to a traumatic breakdown in their relationship, he had the blessed assurance of God’s abundant grace. As he turned to continue distributing flyers, he asked my name and shared that his was Michael. “Let’s pray for each other, Michael” I said. “Amen,” he responded.

That was it. That’s as far as it went. I presume his needs were met, but I experienced an unexpected epiphany. In that brief, unplanned encounter, I came to experience once again the glory of Jesus, a light shining in the darkness, the love of God made flesh. In that brief passing conversation, I was called to believe again in that God from whom all blessings flow. In that passing moment, Michael didn’t so much tell me who God was for him, but rather showed me by an outward and visible sign – his positive attitude in spite of his situation – about an inward and spiritual grace - peace and serenity.

That is what epiphanies are all about, manifesting through signs, through those everyday things around us, a reality that is unexpected, extravagant, amazing grace. Are you ready to see beyond the signs, beyond the obvious, beyond the commonplace? Are you ready to believe in Jesus?