

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord,
Jesus Christ.

It is a delight to be with you today at St. Paul's. I have warm memories of previous visits and am grateful for your welcome.

Our lessons for this **Second Sunday After the Epiphany** point to the theme of *God's abundant generosity*.

In our first lesson, from Isaiah, we read,

*For 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.*

I think I understand what the prophet meant.

Let me explain.

Some background first. I love basketball. I attend George Mason basketball games.

On one occasion, I arrived at my seats (in the third row) to see that they were taken. Two of my grandsons were sitting in the seats. They were there to surprise me. They knew that I would be happy to see them. In fact, they knew that I would be delighted.

As I greeted those two boys – beaming with joy at surprising me, I caught a brief glimpse of God’s delight in us. As a grandfather of four, I delight in my children and my grandchildren. They are a topic of constant conversation. News about them travels very fast through our family. I now understand why grandparents carry pictures. It is just a glimpse of how much God loves us.

*For 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.*

The builder is God – and the relationship of God to God’s people is likened to marriage.

- This prophecy is offered to a people who have suffered and who have felt abandoned.
- They have known desolation.

The prophecy conveys God's promise – a promise of God's commitment to God's people.

- God delights in us.
- God loves us even more that we love our own.

Our Gospel lesson continues the theme of God's abundant love. Jesus is attending a wedding at Cana. We see that God delights in a marriage celebration.

- The mother of our Lord did indeed call upon her son.
- She knew him to have extraordinary power.
- But she did not yet fully understand his mission. The time for his full revelation had not yet come.

Jesus was not yet prepared to reveal his identity. He had not come to be a miracle worker, **but had come to establish the salvation of the entire world.** What may have appeared to be a minor crisis at a party was not seen to be of ultimate importance to the Savior of the World.

Today, we look back to the miracle at Cana as a sign – a hint – a preliminary glimpse of the mission of the savior of the world. While some of the partygoers might have wondered why the good wine was saved for last, they may have missed what else had happened before their very eyes. They witnessed the abundant generosity of God.

Later in this service, I will read a letter of institution for Liz Tomlinson as your rector. They are a charge for your rector to reflect God's abundant generosity.

*Care alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor. By your words, and in your life, proclaim the Gospel. Love and serve Christ's people. **Nourish them, and strengthen them** to glorify God in this life and in the life to come."*

And in our lesson from I Corinthians 12, we again encounter God's extravagance. God not only delights in us, God gives us gifts to be given away – to be used in service – to be offered in ministry.

We read, *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.*¹ God delights in empowering us for service.

This means that everyone has a gift and that everyone's gift is important.

- Our gifts are very close to our passions – to what gives us life and vitality.
- And our gifts are closely related to God's call.
- God does in fact nudge us and encourage us to be responsive to the needs that surround us.
- And when God nudges, God provides the very gifts needed to fulfill God's call.

¹ 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Gifts are given for a purpose, for God's purposes. In the fourth chapter of Ephesians we read that gifts are given, "*to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*"²

As I come into this congregation, I have arrived with assumptions about you –things I believe to be true about this congregation.

My first assumption is that God adores you – absolutely loves you and delights in you. You are God's beloved. When you worship God, you express love back to this one who first loved us.

Second, I believe that you have been given and will continue to be given all of the gifts that are needed to do what God calls you to do.

- In effect, I believe that this congregation is sufficient – fully gifted to fulfill your call.

² Ephesians 4:12

God gives to us what is needed to do what God calls us to do.

Third, I believe that God delights in our generosity – that it is God's will that we give and that we serve.

This congregation is engaged in significant ministry to this changing neighborhood. That ministry requires patience and care and time and energy. And your efforts will be blessed again and again.

The presence and ministry of St. Paul's Church in this neighborhood reflects God's abundant generosity – God's love and God's compassion for the entire world.

May God bless you as you serve in His Name. Amen.