

Keep the Party Going

Second Sunday after Epiphany
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton

Sunday, January 17, 2010
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Isaiah 62:1-5; I Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What if Jesus' mother hadn't said a word at Cana? What if she had **not** turned to her son and told him they'd run out of wine at the wedding party? I'm not suggesting that nagging our Lord God is the way to get our way. I'm not suggesting that the cliché "The squeaky wheel gets the grease" applies to how we handle our part in this relationship we have with God. But I was intrigued by that question from something I read this week—what if Jesus' mother hadn't said a thing?

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.

Like the mother of Jesus in our Gospel, whoever is speaking here as our first lesson opens is determined to be heard, determined that something should happen. Some scholars say this is the Lord God speaking—God saying aloud and fervently that he will restore Israel to the glory he always intended for his chosen people. There's every reason to agree with those scholars. But other scholars suggest someone else is speaking these words—the prophet or someone who will not stop declaring the promises God has made, not stop living in those promises. Not until God fulfills them. Again, I'm not suggesting that someone is nagging God, or is simply a "squeaky wheel." But if these scholars are right, then this someone other than God who refuses to rest until Israel is vindicated—well, that someone has a lot of courage to speak such things. And a lot of faith in God.

Miep Gies died on Monday at 100 years of age. If that name sounds familiar, it's because, like me, you read *The Diary of Anne Frank* at some point in your life. Miep was an office secretary who helped hide the Jewish teenager and her family for two years during World War II in a secret apartment above the Amsterdam warehouse where Anne's father, Otto Frank, had once worked. Miep, her husband Jan, and four other non-Jews smuggled food, books, and news of the outside world into that apartment behind the moveable bookcase. Those courageous and compassionate acts sustained the Frank family in the "Secret Annexe" until August 1944 when an informer went to the police, who broke into the apartment and carted the Jews off to concentration camps. Anne Frank died of typhus at Bergen-Belsen in March 1945. But she left a record of her time behind the bookcase—a record many of us here and people the world over have read.

Yet it might not have been, had it not been for Miep. She gathered the pages of that diary after the Franks were arrested, keeping the papers locked up until Anne Frank's father returned—the only family member to survive the death camps. But what if Miep had not saved the diary? What if she had left the pages scattered on the floor, their powerful words never reaching the generations moved by Anne's story? Or, what if, when Otto Frank asked Miep to hide his family above the warehouse, she had said nothing—her silence a clear refusal to help? Or, what if, years later, Miep had kept silent when Holocaust deniers claimed the diary was forged, never refuting their bombastic claims?

What if... what if Mary hadn't turned to the servants at the wedding party and said, "Do whatever Jesus tells you"? And what if the servants themselves hadn't obeyed Jesus' instructions to fill six large stone jars with water?

Of course, these are all hypothetical questions. We know the mother of Jesus **did** tell Jesus of the need at that wedding party. We know Miep **did** help hide the Frank family, save the diary, and refute the claims of forgery. They did not keep silent. They did not rest. Perhaps they knew they were somehow a part—maybe only a small part—but a part nevertheless of something bigger that was true and good and right, that would bring God's loving purposes to fruition.

Now, the servants at the wedding at Cana were clueless as to Jesus' identity, but his mother had an inkling, knew Jesus was God's gift to her and her people. Maybe Jesus himself hadn't figured to let the wraps off this gift that he was in the middle of a wedding reception—his initial response to his mother is "*My hour has not yet come.*" But John makes it clear that Mary must have thought now was as good a time as any. There was a need—okay, so the problem was the wine was **all**—but there was a need nonetheless. To keep the party going, to keep this celebration of a joyous marriage going, more wine was needed. The mother of Jesus turns to the only one she believes can meet that need with a gracious, generous response. She has both courage to speak and faith in Jesus.

This miracle that John recounts in his gospel is the first of many signs revealing Jesus' identity—the first sign that Jesus is everything needed and can do everything necessary to bring about what God intends for his people: Abundance, forgiveness, justice, healing, life. The signs John writes about throughout his gospel become increasingly amazing and scandalous, until at last Jesus' final sign is calling his dear friend Lazarus out from the tomb. (Which reminds us who live post-Easter that Jesus himself would be raised from the dead—the pivotal saving event at the hands of our God.)

Now, six jars of good wine at a little wedding party might not seem much like salvation, but it was a start, a glimpse of the mighty things God would do in and through his Son. **It kept the party going.** And it happened when the mother of Jesus would not keep silent, but instead was willing to participate in God's mighty acts in this moment, as a catalyst to our Lord's generosity.

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.

I received a couple photographs this week from Randy Ober, our bass guitarist in FaithX. (You know our bass guitarist—Randy Ober is the one with the real cool hairstyle...) Randy couldn't be here today, but gave me permission to show you these photographs. Randy and his oldest son Chase traveled to the Dominican Republic a few weeks ago. (As a quick reference, recall that the Dominican Republic is the eastern half of the island of Hispaniola, the western half being the nation of Haiti, so recently devastated by earthquake. The Dominican Republic is not quite as poor as Haiti, but the difference between poverty and abject poverty is sometimes a very fine line.) Randy and Chase went to the Dominican Republic as volunteers with HOPE International, a faith-based organization consisting of a network of microfinance institutions. In other words, HOPE International provides loans to individuals, families and small businesses in impoverished countries, empowering them to build up their lives and communities. It provides business training and mentoring. This is not a hand-out which will not last, but the creation of sustainable economic enterprise where once there was despair. HOPE International is a generous, gracious response to a

great need. *(Note to reader: 3 photos displayed on screen of the Ober trip to the Dominican Republic.)*

What a wonderful opportunity for Randy and Chase! And it seems to me that organizations like HOPE International refuse to keep silent and will not rest until people thrive, shine in dark places. Of course, resisting the urge to be silent takes courage. Resisting the urge to rest from the task takes faith. Those who participate in HOPE International must have plenty of both.

But not everyone can catch a plane to the Dominican Republic. Then maybe you're one of our Trinity friends who served at a homeless shelter this past week. (Mrs. Enney, have you caught up on your sleep yet? I know you spent much time last week coordinating the efforts of Trinity volunteers at the Susquehanna Harbor Safe Haven on North 12th Street in Harrisburg. Thank you.)

Or maybe you sent a check for emergency relief to Haiti. Or you tutored at one of the elementary schools in Harrisburg. Or you are going to pack boxes next Wednesday at the Lutheran World Relief warehouse in New Windsor, MD. Or you visited one of our at-home members. Or you sent a get-well card to someone in the hospital. Or you prayed with a friend who is hurting. Or you introduced yourself and welcomed someone new coming in our doors. Any of these tasks requires courage and faith, but the Lord God through his Holy Spirit will generously give those particular gifts in our need, so we can generously give to others in their need.

What is our part to play? Where are we catalysts to our Lord's generosity? For you and I as God's people are indeed part of that "something bigger" that is true and good and right—in our baptism we are called by God to participate in the signs of his loving purposes coming to fruition in this world. We are called not only to speak God's promises of his kingdom, but to live in those promises. Until God fulfills every last one of them. That's not nagging. Like Mary, that's just keeping the party going. **AMEN.**