



Second Sunday after the Epiphany(C)
January 20, 2019
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Today's Gospel is probably familiar to many if not most of us. It is the first of the miracles of Jesus and is an amazing story by all accounts. We tend to focus this passage of Jesus. After all, he is the one who miraculously turns water into wine, really good wine.

Let's redirect our focus somewhat away from Jesus to his mother, Mary. Let's also consider her tenacity or her courage in her request if not command to her son.

Recently, I read an article about "grit". The article began, "Grit is all around us. At work retreats. On basketball courts. In your grandmother's book club. It's a buzzword now, the parlance of education advocates and business school books.... A combination of passion and perseverance for a singularly important goal." The article went on to describe grit as "situational courage. When you need it, you need it right now." (Men's Health, "What is it and why do you need it?". January/February 2019, p. 68)

I contend that in this Gospel passage, Mary, the mother of Jesus, had 'situational courage'. She saw what she perceived as a considerable need, the newlywed couple to be greatly embarrassed had they run out of wine at their wedding reception.

One might consider Mary's request to have forced Jesus in to a corner. Jesus just might have been startled if not somewhat irritated at the request. However, he moved forward with a kind of grit which also could be considered 'situational courage'.

When reflecting on the need, the request and the outcome at the marriage feast in Cana, I thought about families here at St. Mark's and elsewhere: Couples or single adults with two, three or four children in today's world. I thought about our youngest Sexton, Adbull, who works several jobs, helps to take care of his siblings and takes classes at night at GRCC.

I thought about the people in California now dealing with floods and mudslides after a season of horrific fires. I thought about the people of Syria whose cities are essentially wastelands of broken concrete and shattered dreams.

I thought about our neighbors at our Breakfast Café and those going without food or shelter this morning as cold as it is outside. On a wonderfully positive note, I also thought about our brother, Lee Strodman, who has lived one hundred years and continues to smile with great courage and strength.

I hope that we can all agree that embedded in the human spirit is a 'true grit', an ability to move forward with courage and strength even in the face of tremendous obstacles. Where does that come from? Where do we find the 'courage and strength' to carry on?

Where do those working without paychecks find the courage and strength to keep working? Where do those dealing with potentially life-threatening disease find courage and strength to keep going?

Where did our brother, Martin Luther King, Jr., find the courage and strength to carry on in his crusade for racial justice in America? So many questions in life!

In my message last week, I said, “Who inspires us makes us who we are”. (Ad: Cancer Treatment Centers of America) The examples are all around us in life. We just need to make time to observe them.

Does not Mary, the mother of Jesus, inspire us? Does not Jesus inspire us with his first miracle? Does not Martin Luther King inspire us with powerful words which ring in our ears long after his assassination in 1968?

(Pause: Quotes from MLK, Jr. recited from various members of the congregation)

Imagine the courage and strength which Martin must surely have had in his life’s work. His mission sought to bring us to a new awareness of justice for all people, an awareness that God created all people equally, as our Constitution tells us.

Martin’s mission sought to bring us an awareness of those who have, those who have not and those who struggle. So many struggle to find shelter, to put food on a table, to pay an electric bill or contend with a doctor’s diagnosis almost too difficult to bare.

Several people in our Parish have recently endured surgeries and some are dealing with cancer of one kind or another. My heart goes out to them. My heart also goes out to a dear long-time friend who has stage four cancer. In a conversation with her last week, she told me that she has six to twelve months to live.

How do we endure? How do we find the ‘true grit’ and ‘situational courage’ to carry on in the face of adversity, even life challenging adversity?

I believe that we find the grit we need through the grace of God. God’s grace is freely given. God’s grace is ours to embrace, a grace which we need in life to carry on.

Perhaps, we all know people in our lives who are models of courage, who in spite of the circumstances of their lives, find the inner strength to move forward. Mary and Jesus did. Martin did. Many others did and millions around the world continue to move forward in spite of the circumstances of their lives.

Perhaps, you and I have had to face challenges and had to endure with a kind of inner strength and courage. I pray that we can step back in gratitude for the strength which is ours in life.

The Holy Scriptures are replete with stories of strength and courage. Think about the lives of Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Jesus, himself. Think about those who have known adversity and carried on with an almost miraculous strength and courage.

Today, let us give thanks for that courage and strength which are ours through the grace of God. That grace empowers us as it empowered Jesus, as it empowered Martin and so many in life.

Our paths are illumined by the grace of God, the light of Christ. That light shatters darkness and is a light which no one or no thing can extinguish. We claim that light in Epiphany as the grace of God in our midst.

Join me in gratitude to God. We give thanks for light, for strength and courage. We give thanks for those around us who continue to inspire us to keep moving forward in life. Amen.