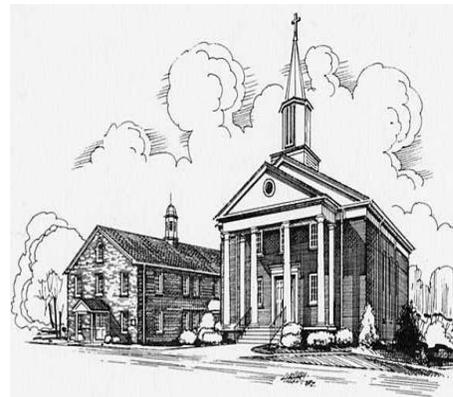


The Lessons Appointed for Use on
the

Second Sunday after Christmas
All Years



Isaiah 62:1-5

Psalms 36:5-10

John 2:1-11

The Collect

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Isaiah 62:1-5

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.

The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;

and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will give.

You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;

but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land Married;

for the Lord delights in you,
and your land shall be married.

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.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.

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. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same

Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who

had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

SERMON

At lunch after church last week, my family went to Frische's in Ironton. In the course of the conversation, we found ourselves celebrating this unbelievably nurturing congregation. I believe that this church reflects the very soul of the first house churches. You are a blessing to all who gather here. I want to poke around a bit in that observation and see if we can find something new and helpful.

When John wrote the letters we find in the book of Revelation, he addressed his letters to the angel of each church. He didn't address the leadership or the congregation. He addressed the angel of the church. What distinguishes the notion of the angel of an institution is the Bible's emphasis on vocation. The angel of a church is not simply the sum total of all it is – the furnishings and the building, the people and the sign out front. The an-

gel of a church also bears the message of what it ought to be. John is saying that a church has an external, physical manifestation, and an inner spirituality or collective personality.

In my view, this church has a loving, nourishing angel which makes it possible for me, a man with no pastoral training, to serve as your pastor. I have as much business playing pastor as I have playing electrician at my house, and let me tell you – that did not go well! Ronnie had to bail me out. The fact that we have enjoyed nearly ten years of rewarding partnership is a tribute to the angel of this church. It is the gift of your angel – the gift of nurture and support. Put me in the pulpit of a large church, or one divided, and the birds would pick the flesh from my corpse in less than a day!

A partnership that is one sided, though, can't survive for long. I must bring something to the table. For half a

century, as a lawyer, as a front man for bands, and as a radio announcer, I have run my mouth in front of people. It's the gift I was given – the gift of gab. Of course, I don't just run my mouth (or I try not to just do that). I also spend a lot of time reading and studying to assure that I say fewer dumb things to you, so I bring another gift to our partnership – the gift of study.

Now, before either of us get the big head, let's ask a question: where did these gifts come from? Is it because we're practically perfect in every way such that we can celebrate the wonder that is each of us, or could it be that we can not take any pride in these gifts at all because they were given us, not earned, and that the proper response is not pride, but humility and gratitude? Yes, it could be exactly that.

Paul wrote to his church in Corinth about gifts.

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. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

So now we have to examine the distribution of gifts.

Does God prefer some people over others, and thus gives them neat gifts, or is there something more to it than that? I think the answer is in that last sentence from Paul's letter, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Each of us! God is not Santa Claus, rewarding the good little kids and leaving coal for the bad ones. God is deeply and lovingly committed to the common good and distributes His gifts to each of us to further that common good. Sin, in all its forms, owes its existence to our failure to recognize that. Were we to follow God's lead, the common good

would become our most important treasure.

A father gives his young son some money and tells him to buy milk and bread because it is going to snow. That's what you do when it's going to snow – you buy milk and bread. Nobody knows why. Instead, the little boy buys ice cream and eats it all himself. The gift of the father which was intended for the common good has been appropriated for the use of only one. If we receive God's gifts and appropriate them for our own use, turning our backs on the common good and insist on “me first”, how may we expect God to view that?

The prophet of our time, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of his dream of a society in which a man was judged not by the color of his skin, but by the content of his character. Isaiah spoke of God's dream for his people:

You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;

but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land Married;

for the Lord delights in you,
and your land shall be married.

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.

So it shall be if we will but focus our efforts on the common good, and stop being such selfish little good-for-nothings. Our job is not so much to be good little boys and girls, celebrating our own righteousness, as it is to become thoughtfully and purposefully aware of those gifts which God has poured out upon each of us

for the common good. Once aware, we are to become committed to the direction those gifts take us. Are you, like President Jimmy Carter, skilled in carpentry? Then go build houses for those without homes. Are you given the gift of cookery? Then spend all day on your feet dishing out soup for the Our Lady Foundation like Kathy did this week. Are you a gifted speaker? Then by all means speak to those around you of the injustice of the world, it's greed and its cruelty, just as Dr. Martin Luther King did, holding up before a world with no vision a picture of what it could become. Resolve to do as Mary told the servants at the wedding at Cana:

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

In 2016, let us resolve to focus on the gifts God has granted us. Yes, each of us has a gift. Let us focus our attention on those gifts, and ask the question, "In what

direction does this gift lead me for the common good?
How may I use this gift in such a way that all are benefited? How can I follow God and His commitment to the common good?”

AMEN

BENEDICTION

I had a really good section in my early draft of this sermon that made me look great. I said that I am so committed to using my gifts for the common good that I don't buy lottery tickets, since I don't think that winning all that money would further the common good. Nothing to do with me being tight – I'm making a statement. Of course, when we got to a billion dollars I caved. Now I'm down twenty bucks with nothing to show for it. That's to be expected when we stop following the lead of our gifts and make our own greed and desires into our highest good. We wind up with nothing to show for it. The milk and bread you bring back to your family when it's going to snow are the gifts God has given you for the common good. Be aware of your gifts and follow them! Live the words of Basil the Great:

“When someone steals another's clothes, we call them a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who could clothe the naked and does not? The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry; the coat unused in your closet belongs to the one who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the one who has no shoes; the money which you hoard up belongs to the poor.”¹

Until we meet again, may the Lord bless you, and keep you.

May the Lord lift His countenance upon you, and be gracious to you.

May the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and give you peace.

¹ St. Basil the Great. Basil of Caesarea, 329 or 330 – January 1 or 2, 379, was the Greek bishop of Caesarea Mazaca in Cappadocia, Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). In addition to his work as a theologian, Basil was known for his care of the poor and underprivileged. He is considered a saint by the traditions of both Eastern and Western Christianity.

BENEDICTION

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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