

## THE GIFT OF NUDGING

1/20/19 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Epiphany 2 (C): Isaiah 62:1-5, Psalm 36:5-10, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, John 2:1-11

I bet some of you have mothers like mine. They mean to be helpful; they mean to nudge in positive ways, but it doesn't always result in what we would call an "affirming experience". While some moms understand the power of discreet nudges, others...not so much. Let me give you an example.

It was a warm, sunny day during high school, and I was sitting up in the bleachers, next to Mom, watching a Legion baseball game. Half the town was there, sitting on the tailgates of their pick-up trucks or next to us in the stands. I can't remember what the score was, but because of what I'm about to tell you, I can't imagine it was a very exciting game.

So, I'm looking out at the action in front of me and I notice Mom leaning over, staring intently at my face. Finally, she says, "You sure have a lot of blackheads on your nose!"

Oh...my...goodness! I was so embarrassed! Everyone around me surely heard her! I wanted to slip through the slats of the bleachers, and just melt into the ground beneath me. Just the same—however humiliating, however awkwardly delivered—it was a very effective nudge! Within days, I had polled a couple of close friends and figured out a new skin-care routine for myself.

In this morning's Gospel reading, Jesus's mom does her own nudging. It's not clear that it's a nudge until later in the action, and it's not apparent whether Jesus is embarrassed or not by his mom's nudging, but it's definitely clear that he gets defensive. Mary says: "They have no wine." And like a petulant teenager, he responds, "What concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."

Mary, like any good mother, is not easily deterred from her nudging. She seems to believe it is his time, so she turns to the servants, and says, "Do whatever he tells you," indicating something is about to happen.

Of course, this passage can be looked at from a number of viewpoints. One is that Jesus was helping establish the idea of God's economy of time—that things don't happen on human time-tables, but on divine timing. At the same time, if that were the only point, then why did Jesus say it wasn't his time, only to take action minutes later?

So, another way of looking at this story, is that Jesus, in his humanity, was still coming to terms with his ability to take divine action. In the midst of the wedding at Cana, he stands smack in the middle of his life as the son of a carpenter, and his life as the son of God. Like the times other prophets stood before God and said, "I'm not ready," through Mary's nudging, God says, "You are ready," and Jesus proceeds to transform something ordinary—water—into something extraordinary—wine.

If even Jesus needed nudging, then maybe it's easier for all of us to accept that we all need people who are good at nudging in our lives. The capital campaign consultants we hired refer to themselves as "professional" nudgers. One of them, Vanessa, who happens to be Jewish, would also point out that as a Jewish mother, Mary can't help but be a great "nuder"!

Jesus had been preparing his whole life, up until this point, to fully live into his divinity. He spent time gathering people who could support him and help achieve his goals. But like any of us, he needed someone to say: "Now. Now's the time. You can do it. I believe in you."

When Jesus soaks up that affirmation, we then witness the lavishness of God's love. The passage describes the abundance in detail: there are six stone water jars, each with the ability to hold twenty to thirty gallons of liquid. That's a lot of wine! And, then, we're told, it was not just any wine that Jesus created; it was good wine!

Which can lead us back to the other perspective I mentioned about the economy of God's time. Mary makes note of the needs of the community. While wine is an extravagance to us, in this setting, it seems to represent a necessity. What becomes clear is God can provide this necessity, but as we review the events that transpire, one might ask, why then would God initially deny providing the necessity? Why would God's response be: "not yet"?

And, aren't there so many times when we ask that very question—even today. Look at the situation we're in right now: day 30 of the longest government shut down ever. Where is God in that? While we probably have a wide-range of opinions about how the situation should be solved, I'm sure we all agree that this is not fair to so many people. Those most affected are often some of the lowest paid people in our country—they can barely make ends meet when they do have a paycheck, and now they have no paycheck. And there are many others who rely on federal subsidies to survive, but they're not receiving those subsidies.

The income of government employees should not be held hostage; the supplies needed by those who can't afford everything they need, should not be held hostage. Where's God's extravagance in that?

But, perhaps, this is the nudge some of us need to take action...to contact our representatives and demand that it's time to stop this insanity. Or, perhaps, it's time for us, like Mary, to really nudge God into action. That might sound strange to you, that we could nudge God into action, but liberation and feminist theologians often refer to the idea that as we are changed by God, God is also changed by us.

Rather than trying to establish a hierarchy among Father, Son and Holy Spirit, these theologians explore the communal nature of the Trinity, and the idea that there is a giving and receiving from one to the other, which extends to creation. From that perspective, within the Trinity, and in our relation to the triune God, there is a sense of mutuality. Theologian and professor Elizabeth Johnson wrote: "Speaking about the Trinity expresses belief in one God who is not a solitary God but a communion in love marked by overflowing life."<sup>1</sup>

So, in our prayers, we are nudgers of God. At the same time, in our reciprocal relationship, we listen for how God might be nudging us. Prayer is about living into our relationship with God, which means we don't just pray that God will solve all our problems; rather we pray to receive our own personal nudge about how we might help solve those problems...how we might become God's hands and feet in the situation.

One side of our discipleship is that we listen for the nudges of God, as well as nudge God. The other side of that equation is using your gift of nudging—if that's one of your gifts—to the fullest. We all need encouragers in our lives; we need mentors who see our gifts before we see them in ourselves.

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<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (Crossroad Publishing: 1992), 222.

You can probably think of a time in your own life when you, like Jesus, had someone, who knew you inside and out, who recognized a gift in you, before you were ever aware of it. And weren't those times an incredibly powerful catalyst for you?

Our reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians has a bit to say about all of this as well. The Apostle Paul is writing to the early church community in Corinth, and we can assess by his concern, here, that some people are flaunting their gift of being able to speak in tongues. Apparently, they're not just flaunting their abilities, they are using their gifts for ill, while also claiming certain gifts are more important than others.

Paul steps in to, both, establish the truth about our gifts and talents—that is they all come from God—and to encourage the rest of the community that their gifts are equally valid and important to the larger body of Christ. His comments still apply in our modern lives, that these God-given gifts aren't just for our personal enjoyment, but that they are to be shared—they are given for the community. Paul writes: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

Our gifts are activated by the Holy Spirit, and they are given to us that we might serve the community around us. When's the last time you used your gift of nudging to serve as a powerful catalyst in someone else's life? Who in your world might need a bit of encouragement? Don't worry so much about the delivery; even if your words serve only to plant a seed, a little nudge can go a long way. Your nudge just might help turn something ordinary into something extraordinary!

-AMEN

### **Collect of the Day:**

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, worshipped, 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.

### **Psalm 36:5-10**

5 Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, \*  
and your faithfulness to the clouds.

6 Your righteousness is like the strong mountains,  
your justice like the great deep; \*  
you save both man and beast, O LORD.

7 How priceless is your love, O God! \*  
your people take refuge under the shadow of your wings.

8 They feast upon the abundance of your house; \*  
you give them drink from the river of your delights.

9 For with you is the well of life, \*  
and in your light we see light.

10 Continue your loving-kindness to those who know you, \*  
and your favor to those who are true of heart.

### **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.