

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 2nd Sunday after Epiphany, January 20, 2019.

One of the great feelings is to be vindicated. Usually vindication occurs when something we have claimed is proven. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. “No, you’re not,” said the authorities. But his actions seemed to support his claim. Actions like turning water into wine. Had he wanted to brag, he might have said, “How’s that for proof?” And, if the wedding miracle wasn’t convincing, how ‘bout the Resurrection. The ultimate vindication. Hold that thought.

The prophet Isaiah (**Isaiah 62:1-5**) claimed that God would not forsake Jerusalem. He, Isaiah, promised that he would not rest until that happened. And Isaiah didn’t rest. He continued to claim that a Messiah would appear. Centuries later, the Messiah did appear. That’s what you and I believe. Jesus was and is that Savior. Isaiah died without feeling vindicated, but vindicated he eventually was.

Yes, sometimes vindication is delayed. And sometimes this vindication happens well after we die. Not sweet for those who die, but very sweet for the families of those now vindicated. Waiting for vindication, however, longing for vindication, whether in this life or the next, is a frustrating way to live. We feel so right about what we did or who we are, and so frustrated and hurt that others don’t see things the same way, that we expend a lot of energy getting nowhere. Energy that could be spent better to our benefit and the benefit of others.

When we see others anxious about vindication, we are tempted to say, “Get over it. Get on with your life. You’re never going to change the minds of others. Move on.” We’ve heard this advice, and we have given this advice. Sometimes we listen, and sometimes we don’t. And sometimes others listen, and sometimes they don’t. All the more reason to “move on.”

But where? How? Moving on is never as easy task. By definition, vindication, or the lack of it, is not shallow. It runs deep, which means that the “moving on” strategy has to be deep too. There’s not an easy fix, but at least one’s energy is in the direction of healing rather than continued frustration.

Our Psalm this morning (**Psalm 36:5-10**) describes a profound love. It even uses the word “deep.” Verse 5 of Psalm 36: “Your righteousness is like the strong mountain, your justice like the great deep!” This is the kind of faith, the kind of conviction, that can enable you and me to “move on” even when we are disappointed and

angry and hurt. Again, vindication is often a slow process, if it occurs at all. Waiting for it can suck the life out of us, if we let it.

We know people who have died hurt and angry. We also know people who, though hurt and angry, die with love in their hearts and maybe even forgiveness. In our best moments, we would like to be the latter, and we would encourage others to be the latter, for their sake and the sake of the world. Forgiveness can be a parting gift.

Generating such forgiveness though is not easy, especially when we try to generate it on our own. Often the hurt and anger are too much to handle on our own. A right spirit, a forgiving spirit, is much easier to develop and present to the world when there others of the same mindset.

In his First Letter to the Corinthians (**I Corinthians 12:1-11**) Paul speaks of a variety of services and activities and manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Verse 11 of chapter 12: “All these are activated by one and the same Spirit who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.” The result: strength in numbers.

Today’s Gospel (**John 2:1-11**) - the wedding at Cana of Galilee – has a good outcome. The best wine comes at the end, not at the beginning. But it didn’t look good for awhile. The first response of Jesus was pretty snippy: “What concern is that to you?” The curt response does not deter his mom, however. Sometimes, maybe at all times, moms know their children better than the children know themselves. So she says to the host, “Do whatever he tells you.” Well, Jesus knows exactly what needs to be done, and does it. A miracle. The first. The start of something very, very big. Good for you, mom.

The point is simply that we, acting alone, sometimes have trouble digging out of the holes that we have dug for ourselves or that others have dug. When it comes to vindication, in our mind at least, others are the problem. Well, others don’t have to remain the problem. There are other “others” who can be the solution, if they are of a constructive mind and encourage our minds to be constructive. This coming together of the “manifestations of the Holy Spirit” is powerful.

And it is available. Indeed it is alive and well right here. We are a believing and worshiping community, offering our gifts to one another and to the world. And one of the ways we do this is to keep our own desires for vindication in check, knowing that hurt and anger is counter-productive.

Much better to move on, to live positively for another day. Let God do the heavy lifting. Better for us, and better for others. Accept and model the “new name” of which Isaiah speaks: “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 Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight.”

Next Sunday we will sing the familiar hymn “We Gather Together.” It fits next week’s sermon really well, but we could have used it today. It speaks to the possibility of a long wait for vindication, even when we know we are right. This wait can be oppressive. That’s the adjective that the hymn uses. But the oppression doesn’t have to last, doesn’t have to be the final word. Here is the last phrase of that familiar hymn: “Let thy congregation escape tribulation: thy Name, O Lord, be ever praised! O Lord, make us free!”

This was the prayer of Martin Luther King, Jr. whom we honor this weekend. Now here was a man who spoke of vindication, not for himself, but for others. He had a dream about what America could be. What we need to remember about this dream, however, is that it was based in thanksgiving for what had happened, not wishful thinking about what might happen.

What sustained Dr. King, as he waited for his dream of “justice for all” to be vindicated, to be realized, was the conviction that the greatest freedom of all, the greatest vindication, had already arrived in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and that this Victory was the assurance that other victories could and would follow. “Thank God Almighty, we are free at least” was not a new sentiment for Dr. King. Yes, there were still barriers to address, but the hand-writing, the Victory of Jesus over death, had been on the wall for a long time. Dr. King was a believer. And his courageous words and deeds were grounded in this belief.

This is a good lesson for you and me, as we seek vindication for ourselves or others. The greatest vindication of all is here. It’s not called the Good News to come. It’s called the Good News that has come. And the more we can take in that Good News, as Dr. King did, the stronger we will be as we seek to bolster the spirits of others. This Good News, by design, is contagious, which prompts us to pray, as we did this morning: “Grant that your people, O Lord, 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.” Amen.

