

Last weekend we explored the story of John baptizing folk at the river Jordan. We reflected on the commitments people made as they were baptized. We noted that Jesus made the commitment to teach, heal, sacrifice and even die on behalf of humanity. Then we thought about the various commitments we have made for others in our lives over the years. Finally, I asked us to think of the new commitments you might make here at St. Paul, for the good of others, this Epiphany season which extends into early March. I invited you to think of making a commitment to one of three options. Remember them? They were:

- Green group conversation/brainstorming
- Reconciling Congregation exploration
- Fresh Expression outreach

A number of you jumped on board with a commitment. Each voice and insight enriches the process. There is still time for others. Let Pastor Marta, Jerry or I know.

This is our third week of seeing the divine signs our gospel lessons and our lives. Two weeks ago it was the Magi visiting the household of Mary, Joseph and Jesus. That was a divine sign. Last week it was the heavens opening up at the baptism of Jesus and the divine proclamation “This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well!” That was a divine sign. Today we see a divine sign at a wedding with the water turning into wine. As we explore our gospel lesson I invite us to think of how we are blessed with the pleasantly unexpected as we invite Jesus into our lives.

I deeply believe that as we invite Jesus into the various aspects of our lives that we can experience the pleasantly unexpected. Not always, but oftentimes. Hear the invitation to Jesus in our gospel lesson.

“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.”

The invitation was given and the pleasantly unexpected came to pass as the water turned into wine.

God’s goodness can come into our lives as we invite Jesus into our midst. Not always, but oftentimes. I remember early on in my Christian walk that I invited Jesus into my academic challenges at school. The saying is true that “they can never eliminate prayer in school as long as teachers keep giving examinations!”

I remember when I invited Jesus into my life as a teenager. Initially, I asked Jesus to help my mind absorb the material I was studying, at least through each test day. I would ask Jesus to give me the calm I needed during an exam so I would not panic and I could recall all the information that I did know. When I did this the pleasantly unexpected came to pass. I had been a B and C student all my life. I never got any F’s but I seldom received any A’s either. But after I invited Jesus into my study life I became a “straight A” student the rest of High School and received Cum Laude academic honors in college. That was pleasantly unexpected because all I really hoped for was a couple of A’s each semester. There are many products out on the market which purport to help us read faster, study better, and comprehend more. Some of them are just money making gimmicks while others are wonderful and effective resources. We are legitimately drawn to such products in this information age because the more we know the more we know we don’t know. Yet, an indispensable step in expanding our intellectual horizon is inviting Jesus into the process. Just as Jesus was intentionally invited to the wedding we need to purposefully invite him into the various aspects of our life.

The text does not state why Jesus was invited. Maybe Jesus was invited because his family was part of the social circle of the people being married. Maybe the bride or the groom was a cousin to Jesus. Maybe it was because Jesus was understood to be a holy man and his presence was requested to provide a special blessing

upon the married couple. Maybe it was known that Jesus was a great guy to be around. He was the type of guy you would want at your party because he told fascinating stories that left people intrigued or shared anecdotes that brought about great laughter.

After inviting Jesus into my educational life I knew, from previous experiences, that I needed to invite him into my dating life, or lack thereof. In my early teen years I knew, as any delusional guy knows, that any girl that had me in her life would be one lucky lady! I thought, "I'm not a bad looking guy and I'm athletic, adventuresome, a decent student, and could be as caring as any other guy." I knew this, I figured God knew this, but not one girl that had ever caught my eye knew this because I was too shy to reveal it.

Let me give you an example of my shyness. I usually went to the Friday night dance at my church during my junior high and early senior high days. They always had the best bands in town and had 300 to 400 kids in attendance. It was the place to hang out on the west side of Omaha on a Friday night. Most nights I would hang out with my friends upstairs in the game room and occasionally go down to the dance in the gym. I would stand and listen to the band. Although most would dance I didn't dance too often.

Then one evening I shocked myself when opportunity presented itself. Lori, who was imprinted on my brain from the hours of class time I spent catching glances of her, was standing in front of me on the dance floor. Usually she was with some guy or with her girlfriends. But she was alone and right in front of me. I shocked myself as I heard myself asking her to dance and then her saying okay.

It was a safe song for me because it was a fast music and anybody could dance to a fast song. For Lori it was just another dance with another guy but for me it was a dream come true. The song ended and I was actually talking with her when fate reared its ugly head. The band started to play their next song and it was a slow song. That would mean I would have to hold her during the entire dance. That was a dream come true for me but it was an aspect of my dream life I was not quite ready to live first hand so I told I would see her later ... never did.

A couple of years later I asked Jesus to be in my relationships. Help me to navigate through the difficult aspects of my relationship with my parents, teachers, coaches, friends and hopefully girls. Not long after that Beth called me. She was the sister of my running buddy. Beth attended another High School but I would see her when I went over to her house to run or hang out with her brother. Soon after her brother went off to college Beth called me. That call was an answer to prayer. She called me so I might ask her out on a date. As time progressed she talked to me so I could talk with her. She held my hand so I could hold her hand. Finally, she kissed me so I could kiss her. Beth was a pleasantly unexpected girlfriend who came into my life to help me become a boyfriend. I was happy I invited Jesus to be in my relationships.

Christ's presence in our relationships is helpful. Our gospel lesson helps us to understand that an invitation to Jesus can bring about the pleasantly unexpected. Not always, but oftentimes.

The pleasantly unexpected occurred when Jesus was invited to a wedding. Remember, the wine gave out and the wedding reception was not nearly over. What were the options? One could not just go out and get more wine on a moment's notice since there weren't 24-hour Wal-marts or HyVee's in biblical days. The option of telling the guests that there was no more wine might sour the mood for the evening.

Yet, Jesus was invited and the pleasantly unexpected came to pass. About 150 gallons of fine wine appeared from a source unknown to the steward or the bridegroom.

Jesus met the need of the wedding party and he met the need of his disciples' discernment about him.

"Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."

Now that's a win-win. Party problem solved and disciples' growth in faith advances. I believe that is what can happen as we invite Jesus into the various aspects of our lives. Not always, but oftentimes. The Christ presence helps us to embrace our problems, discern solutions and grow in our faith. As seen at the wedding the secular and the sacred can be addressed with the presence of Christ.

How might you invite Jesus into the fullness of your life?

I thought I was doing pretty well when I invited Jesus into the educational and relational areas of my life. But then one day I was out on the golf course with my Dad and a couple of his friends. I was hitting bad shot after bad shot. My frustration was growing. I would mumble to myself after a bad shot. I would stalk down the fairway into the rough after another bad shot. Finally, after a horrible shot I threw my club farther than I hit the ball. I looked up and saw these three men looking at me. They didn't say a word, just moved on to their shots. The look in their eyes told me I needed to invite Jesus into my golf game. I needed a new perspective on golfing. The presence of Jesus in my golf game helped me to focus on overcoming mistakes with a positive attitude of how I might recover from a bad shot instead of getting mad at a bad shot.

How might you invite Jesus into the fullness of your life?