

Sermon Transcript

The Rev. Dr. Mary Barber

The 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany

January 19, 2025

Good morning, St. Martin's!! I am so happy and excited to be here with you at last. It's a wonderful beginning for us and for this church community. And it's obvious to me, as I have zoomed with staff, and popped in to the church to show my wife Alleyne around and meet up with James and see the choristers and choir in action, as I have seen many volunteers and staff in these short few days, it's obvious that we are beginning together from a place of health and strength, a place where many members of this community are present and involved daily and weekly in doing the work of the Body of Christ in this place.

Of course, I have also had my anxious times in the days and weeks leading up to today. I had to plan a move and take care of many details, lots of adulting. I am learning a new place and waking up a little disoriented many mornings. I am wavering back and forth between feelings of excitement and being energized by these big changes and learning a new place, and feeling my mind and body tired, and resisting all of it. Every day I seem to hit a limit and at some point I just need to lie down.

St. Martin's, no need to worry, I'll be fine. I am more than fine in fact, and the Holy Spirit keeps showing me signs that I have made a good discernment to be here. Maybe you are feeling a little anxious about me too. Maybe you have made a big move in your life and can relate to this.

It all reminds me of that other big thing I did, about ten years ago now, when I said yes to God's call to priesthood.

At that time, I was in my often frustrating but also very comfortable and successful psychiatry career. I was at a point in my career where I thought I should be ramping it up and not stepping completely off the rails. Back then I had some big resistance to following where God was calling -- I'm too old, I've invested too much in this career, I'm not up to this, I can't make such a big change.

God was persistent, though, and I'm so glad I was proved wrong on all my doubts and resistances. Turns out I could do it! It was not too late for me after all!

And that is what Jesus is saying today in this Gospel. Now it might seem frivolous for Jesus' first miracle in John's Gospel, that all he does is keep the party going by making more wine. But if we look a little deeper, it's anything but frivolous.

One of the great things about this story is that there is a little joke in it. It's a joke-joke, where the steward makes a sassy snarky comment about hosts and wine, and an inside joke, because clearly the bridegroom has no idea what the steward is talking about when he says, "You have kept the good wine until now."

The steward thinks it is the bridegroom who has saved the best wine for last. But the bridegroom probably just gives him a blank stare, because it's Jesus, Jesus who is maybe overhearing all this. Maybe snooping from behind a pillar, and having a little laugh because he knows he is the one who saved the best wine for last.

And so the steward, the servants, and the bridegroom are surprised that the party can go on, because the wine is somehow, miraculously, still flowing. The best wine, in fact.

This is how it is for us too.

All of us are at times resistant to God's call to us, to God's invitation to something new. We often think we can't, we're too old, we've gone too far on this path, we don't have it in us to change, to grow.

We often think we're just about out of wine, and this is how it's gonna be for us, water all the way, and we might as well hang it up and go to bed.

We may feel this way on a personal level.

We feel it about our churches. Things just aren't the same as they were when we were children, or since COVID.

We feel it about our leaders. We just said goodbye to President Jimmy Carter. Tomorrow we honor and celebrate the life of The Rev Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. And tomorrow is also the inauguration, the beginning of another term for a leader who feels like a big contrast from Carter and King. And maybe we feel like those days are over, like we will never have leaders like that again.

We are hopelessly divided, hopelessly cynical, no one goes to church any more, and that's just how it is. Part of our country is literally burning down. Our wine has given out and the party is over.

But I'm here to tell you, St Martin's, that Jesus has a different plan for you and me, a different plan for us and for our world.

Jesus is telling us that we still have plenty of wine in us. The best wine, in fact.

When we decide to follow Jesus, we can expect surprises, we can expect to be challenged, we can expect to be asked to try new things. And we can expect that all of that will be hard.

Despite how his story is sometimes simplified in school lessons and commemorations, we know that Dr Martin Luther King Jr's work, his ministry, was often very hard. If you have read the latest, excellent biography by Jonathan Eig you know that there were many times along the way when Dr King was not sure he was doing the right thing, when he felt not up to it or just too exhausted, and wasn't sure he could keep up the fight. Here in today's Gospel we see that even Jesus seems to be unsure about whether he should take action, whether the time is right. We see that even Jesus needs encouragement from his mother.

Yes, St Martin's, there are many people among us who are facing life changes and struggles, illness and grief and big transitions. Yes, there are fires, and wars, and we are all facing big challenges ahead. AND ALSO, we are far from done, even in these times when it sometimes seems that the wine has run out.

Our latest wine, the wine of our mature seasons, the wine we haven't even pressed yet, will be our best wine. It is the wine with the deepest and richest flavors. It is, it will be, the wine that brings all of us, who we are and who we have been, all that we have learned and experienced, all our wisdom, our joy and our pain. It is the sweetest and boldest and most nuanced wine because it contains all of us, it contains all that we are, as individuals, and as a body.

Do not doubt, do not be afraid, St Martin's. The party is not over. There are challenges ahead, but we are not alone. We have each other, and we have Jesus. Jesus, who has saved the best wine for right now. Amen.