

I speak to you in the name of our Creator; the Son, our Redeemer; and the Holy Spirit, our Comforter. Amen.

Two questions: Have you ever thought about how we are surrounded by signs? They're everywhere, right!

And secondly: Do you know who the "Five Man Electrical Band" were?

Now, you may be wondering how these two questions are connected.

As a young adult, I remember one song. A song by the Five Man Electrical Band, a Canadian group who in 1970 recorded a piece called "Signs". And the chorus went something like this,

**"Signs, signs, everywhere a sign,
Blockin' out the scenery, breakin' in my
mind,
Do this, don't do that, can't you read the
sign".**

Les Emmerson, who penned the lyrics for this tune, was speaking about the many types of signs we observe in our lives almost everyday.

You may be able to identify with what he was speaking about here?

So, what are these different signs?

There are the physical signs which help us to live our lives in a safe and ordered fashion. Signs, such as stop signs, do not enter signs, directional signs, signs that tell us where the emergency exits are located, and of course, speed limit signs.

There are other types of signs beyond these physical signs. In the past four years, we all have become intimately familiar with the signs which helped us to navigate daily life and which are likely the very things which kept us safe in our interactions with others during the COVID Pandemic. COVID has taught us to be safe, to be calm, and to be on guard, time and time again.

Every day, we see signs all around us! And we need to be able to read the signs, don't we?!

How do we decide what is an important sign that we all need to be aware of and what is not? What about signs such as changes in the sky colour, the weather systems, and changes in the seasons. Those are important signs because we get a sense of what to expect from the weather.

And right now, we need to take heed of the signs of changes in the political climate in our communities, our province and even the world? These are important signs of what the economy is doing.

And then, there are those speed limit signs, right? Get caught going too fast and it will cost you.

And there are other signs which tell us how we are being affected in our bodies by changes in the way we feel about things. Now, you may recognize these signs as how we are feeling mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. These are very important signs in our lives, and are signs we should not ignore. These are signs which may help us to stay healthy or to become suddenly very ill.

All these signs and many more, help us to know where we are in our lives and how we believe life is treating us.

This morning, I want you to consider a different type of sign. I want you think about the signs of abundance with which we are blessed, even in the face of adversity. So, how do we look for God's abundance in our lives? And how is it that we know Jesus is present with us through the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit, right here in this present age?

Today's gospel reading taken from the second chapter of John's gospel has a direct connection with the Epiphany story we celebrated two weeks ago. Today, we find Jesus at the wedding at Cana. The scripture does not tell us how, nor why, Jesus, his mother, and his disciples had received an invitation to this wedding celebration. Some commentaries suggest that the wedding was probably that of a relative or close acquaintance of Jesus and his mother, but that is only conjecture because the Scriptures remain quiet regarding this point. In every age throughout history, weddings have been for the most part, times of celebration. Times for families and

friends to witness the joining of two persons in one union before all who are present, and their commitment made before the realms of all creation and our Creator God.

As wedding celebrations go, and have done so in every age, everyone wants to enjoy themselves and to celebrate. This particular wedding, of which we are made a part in today's gospel reading, sounds like any wedding celebration – there is feasting, celebrating, the bonds of marriage, and the consuming of the fruit of the vine, and of course lots of food.

We have heard the story leading up to the wine being changed, but there is another aspect of the story we need to consider. In reality, who knew what had just happened when the water became wine, and better yet, how it became great wine, at that?

For sure, the servants knew because they followed Jesus' instructions. Mary, the mother of Jesus, knew because she told the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to do. Whether the wine steward knew or not, is not clear. Whether the disciples, who were there with Jesus knew is also not clear. The fact is, the changing of the water into wine was an act veiled in secrecy and obscurity, and that is the way it was meant to be. Not everyone needed to know.

Now, if we think back to the journey of the wisemen to find the new-born 'King of the Jews', there is a parallel to our gospel for today. The Magi found the Christ-child they sought and being told not to return to Herod, left for their own

country by another route. They departed in secrecy, leaving Herod none the wiser. Herod did not need to know, if only because of his evil intent toward the Christ child.

You see, epiphanies happen all the time. But do we always see them? Do we recognize them as being God's Spirit present in our midst? Are we willing to see the signs which are there for us to observe? And why is it, we have difficulty recognizing the Holy Spirit at work in our midst? Why do we find ourselves resistant to the Spirit's leading? These are all good questions which may have answers which are hard to find.

The wedding at Cana is the first public sign of Jesus' ministry. John's gospel will share many more signs of Jesus ministry, with us in the coming weeks. The writer of this gospel has chosen not to call them miracles, but rather signs. Signs which are all 'over the top' events. Signs meant to draw attention to something happening right then and right there.

Here are a few more signs from John's gospel:

- 1) The man who was cured after being ill for 38 years. Why, 38 years? Well, 38 years could have been all his natural life for all we know. For sure, it was a long, long time. And for sure he was healed of his infirmity.**
- 2) The healing of the man who had been born blind. Scripture tells us that this type of healing had never happened before. This sign, this miracle, was a sign of God's power working through Jesus.**

3) And finally, the raising of Lazarius from the dead after four days. This was a visible sign of Jesus' power. And it shook the priests and pharisees to their core.

These events were all examples of John's reporting of happenings that were meant to be 'over the top'. Each is meant to be a manifestation of what John had written about in chapter 1, verse 16 where he states "From His fullness (meaning God's grace given through the presence and person of Jesus), we have all received 'grace upon grace'."

The wedding at Cana and the sign shared through the transformation of water into wine, is a manifestation of God's presence among humankind.

There is a theme that runs through John's gospel and that theme can be summed up this way, "do you see who Jesus truly is, the Word made flesh, the 'I AM", God made manifest and [who is] dwelling among us."

That's it! That's what all these signs are about. They are signs so we can come to know the unexpected gift of God, given freely to all humankind. So, I want to return to the questions I posed earlier. How do we look for God's abundance in our own lives? And how is it that we know that Jesus is present with us through the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit, in this present age in which we find ourselves?

Look around you. Look for the gifts God has bestowed on us, even in the face of adversity. I have said this before and it bears saying again, God has promised never to abandon us. We are the adopted children of the Creator, and we can be a delight in the world through the Creator's presence in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Look for the signs, look for the Holy Spirit moving in and through us. It is happening around and through us, everyday. For it is God's great pleasure to share grace with each one of the children of the kingdom of heaven. And it is our job to take God's love and to share it with all the realms of Creation.

Amen