

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

John 2:1-11
Isaiah 62:1-5
Psalm 36:5-10
I Corinthians 12:1-11

January 20, 2019
The Second Sunday after Epiphany

This past Wednesday, I danced. Let me be clear – I am not a dancer but I like to pretend that I am. It's one of those childhood dreams that won't quite let go of my imagination. I never took ballet or tap. I begged my mother to sign me up but she never did. It just wasn't in the budget and so I could only look with envy upon my friends who got to wear the shiny, sequined costumes at their recitals each year. I would justify my absence from those dance classes by saying – who wants to learn those silly routines anyway?

But, secretly, I really wanted to learn how to do a shuffle and a ball change.

So on Wednesday, I got to live out one of my dreams. Frances Wessells, whom some of you may know is our oldest parishioner. She is 99 years young and will turn 100 this August. She visits us when she can but her eye sight is failing and she has to spend much of her time in town in Assisted Living. If you have seen her, you may have noticed that she has to walk very slowly and carefully to make her way up to the communion rail.

You may have watched Frances and thought her movement wasn't that good. But, on the contrary – all you have to do is put her on the dance floor and everything changes.

Frances, in case you didn't know, is a master of modern dance. She taught at Sweet Briar and then the University of Richmond for 25 years. She helped start the VCU School of Dance and taught there for 30 years. Without a doubt, she is a cornerstone of the dance community. And the other day, she asked me to dance with her. And when a master of dance asks you to join her, you say YES!

So, we entered this small dance studio at VCU and began a process that Frances calls interpretative dance. There was no music. Just the sun coming in through the windows, a bare wooden floor, and the two of us. Frances is a force of nature and when she says "start dancing" you start dancing. But to what I wondered? Remember – there was no music. Well, I learned very quickly that you dance to one another.

Interpretative Dance is a process of cause and effect. If you move, then I move in a way that acknowledges your movement. If you bend one way, I might bend another way. If you walk toward me, I might meet you in the middle of the floor and hold your hand. The dance grows as we build a story together. There are no right or wrong movements – just a commitment to one another, to notice each other, to pay attention, and then to respond.

It was beautiful.

I have thought a lot about Frances' lesson of cause and effect. This idea that every action we create has a reaction. That each moment when we encounter someone else matters – in both seen and unseen ways. And here in lies a deep responsibility.

There are two things about this responsibility that stand out to me. The first is that our cause and effect moments more often than not happen within our community – with the people we care about – our family and friends. And you know this to be true...what we do to them and for them, matters. What is done to you and for you, matters. Whether it's good or bad – it changes you.

The second is that our cause and effect isn't meant to be random. We have been given gifts and skills and opportunities to create wholeness for one another. To respond to the needs that we see. To create a lasting effect on one another's lives. It should be an intentional process.

With that in mind, let's take a look at our readings for today. I want you to notice one specific theme from the wedding at Cana – the theme of abundant caring, taking responsibility for a need and doing good. Now, this is the first miracle that Jesus creates in the Gospel of John. The first time he publicly addresses who he is as the Son of God as he turns water into wine. And he chooses to do it for his friends and family members – he chooses to provide for the people within his community.

Historically, running out of wine would have been a disgrace for the family, a shameful lack of hospitality and Mary is quick to bring the problem to Jesus' attention. She lets Jesus know that there is an important need in their midst and that he has the ability to help. And, Mary is adamant that he must use his gifts to provide for the people.

In other words – no one should suffer, no one should fill scarcity, no one should go away hungry or thirsty because you can do something about it. That's this theme of abundant caring. That's seeing a need and making sure that it is addressed – cause and effect – creating change where and when we can.

1 Corinthians is clear that this kind of abundant caring is a responsibility that we all should share. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." The outpouring of gifts given to each of us by the Holy Spirit to use so that everyone can thrive.

Mary identified Jesus' gift at the wedding at Cana. She persisted in making sure that he used his gift for good. And he responded. Not only did he respond but others started to help. The servants got up, without complaint, without debate and started filling those enormous clay jars with water. The cause and effect grew. And the miracle happened.

What does this mean for all of us?

It means that miracles can happen every day but that they must start where we are, with the community we surround ourselves with, to encourage one another and help one another use

our gifts for good. Like Jesus, it starts with our family and friends, with simple gestures of generosity and love.

From there we build strength, compassion, and indeed courage to take our gifts out into the world. We learn that our actions matter and that they make a difference.

Barbara Brown Taylor puts it this way...

“To make bread..., to dig in the earth, to feed an animal or cook for a stranger—these activities require no extensive commentary, no lucid theology. All they require is someone willing to bend, reach, chop, stir. Most of these tasks are so full of pleasure that there is no need to complicate things by calling them holy. And yet these are the same activities that change lives, sometimes all at once and sometimes more slowly, the way dripping water changes stone. In a world where faith is often construed as a way of thinking, bodily practices remind the willing that faith is a way of life.”

This is our way of life. Frances would tell you it's because everything we do matters. Because each action, each reaction makes an impact on someone else. Every one of you has something to offer in this dance we build together. God has already provided you with the gifts. We just need to raise our awareness and look around.

Jesus teaches us that we can start small, right here where we are. Using our gifts to create a community of abundant caring that our faith calls forth in each of us. Amen.