



Savoring Holy Flavor

February 6, 2022

5th Sunday after Epiphany

John 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

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Mary urges Jesus to keep the party going. It's the third day, here at the beginning echoing the gospel's end on the third day when he will be raised, when his time had gone they knew it had not gone. You see, the gospel promise is Jesus brings new life in God's grace where is gone dry, used up, lost. In John's gospel, parties depict God's reign, especially wedding banquets. Holy Love making life flourish in and among us. Later, Jesus echoes "I came so you may share life abundantly – my joy in you and your joy complete." (10:10, 15:11) And John says he writes these signs so we may believe, and through believing join the party of life in Christ. Water into wine, basic necessity becoming a source of goodness, vitality, joy.

If Jesus lived today, Mary might urge coffee instead. Maybe tea. Our staple from morning starter to afternoon or after dinner reviver. Here in church, we love a cup with donut on Sundays, Tuesdays, other treat on Thursdays, to keep our party, our pilgrim journey lively. So, I've seen it on our pilgrimages—tea and scones on Iona. Or stopping in Spain several times a day for another cup of café americano or glass of wine with sweet roll or cheese. Mary and Jesus would have been useful companions! Six stone jars, 30 gallons each, an almost immeasurable amount, unceasing.

Maybe like the Monastery of Irache, with two spigots out the wall for anyone to fill a cup with water or local red wine, however inclined. You see, legend tells of a saintly monk centuries ago offering pilgrim hospitality with a wine fountain that

never stopped flowing. Pondering what Jesus' miracle means for us, here's the Spirit's brew I've sipped this week. On our life journey, happy and hard times, gladness and sadness make us thirst. Olympic size or ordinary everyday variety. "As deer long for flowing streams, so our souls long for God," writes the psalmist. "All who thirst," Isaiah urges, "come share wine and milk without cost." A woman Jesus meets at a well pleads: "Sir, give me this living water forever." We face arid situations, yearning questions when it seems the wine, coffee, tea—goodness, joy, and vitality of life run out. Here's what I wonder. In those moments, what core beliefs can we sip and savor in our souls again? Open the spigot, pump the carafe, fill our cup, refresh tired body, troubled hearts, revived to walk on again, eyes raised to beauties on our journey ahead.

Six vats of water turned to wine, or six carafes of coffee—I imagine like six core beliefs passed on to us, as Paul offers the Corinthians, to help make sense of resurrection faith. Promises to sip and savor or gulp and guzzle when we thirst for goodness, vitality, joy. I've had fun this week imagining how to flavor our core beliefs like coffee or tea. A disclaimer: I'm no expert—one cup a week, Sunday morning to enliven the Spirit. Sometimes meeting in a coffee shop or when offered in someone's home. First taste ever was on a teenage Boy Scout campout—rainy, cold, shivering—some cheap instant mix. Bitterly horrible! So, throughout college and grad school I never drank coffee until I served in Scotland. Everyone I visited said, "American? You must drink coffee." Here it comes. On Sunday mornings between worship in a little church in the hills and the larger one in town, my minister mentor popped by his mother-in-law's for coffee and shortbread. He brewed it super dark, thick. Wow! I'd pour half a cup and surreptitiously fill the rest with milk. I'm a bit better with tea. Still, as I brew a little fun with core beliefs today, I did research consulting others: favorite flavor or experience? I look forward to hearing yours later.

Here's our first flavor or core belief: *God's got this!* Your basic smooth brew—fresh ground beans or an Ethiopian pour over (whatever that is). Our go-to comfort routine. Maybe best as one person said brewed on a morning campfire before the world awakes. Friends, whenever our personal lives or world seem to be falling apart, uncertain, it's the simple affirmation that God who creates all life with power greater than any other—God is with us. And in that Holy Presence, through all life that gets imperfect and hard, we'll be okay. Sip that promise and savor trust, comfort, assurance. Picture a darkest night of the soul, a stormy squall, deep weary fatigue. And raise an imaginary toast with me! God's got this!

Next flavor: *Jesus guides us!* Like being invited to a Cuban family home and served a fresh Cuban brew, or simply whatever decaf is served at Aunt Dani's. With Jesus our yearning for the Sacred gets intimate, incarnate—real in human relations. We ponder possibility, dream of desires. We face significant choices. We feel lost, alone, empty, sad. Central to what we seek is Jesus' way of compassion, forgiveness, mercy; Jesus' truth he's willing to speak and act on about how God wants life to be ordered in our world; Jesus' life thinking about and serving others more than self. And so, connecting with others, we feel our passions. Pose our deep questions. Sip promise and purpose to which Jesus calls us, and savor commitment we can make. Raise a toast with me! Jesus guides us!

The Spirit grows us. Maybe a chai spice latte—more spicey than sweet. Double bergamot Earl Grey. Or good ol' Constant Comment. (I love that ... isn't a great fit?!!) That's how the Spirit speaks—constantly for our ears to hear, tongues to taste. Friends, don't think we have all the answers. Don't accept present personal hardship, established bias, power wedded to prejudice as the only way. Be curious. Be hungry or thirsty. Opening our hearts and minds to the Holy, read, pray, share the arts, listen to others. When we disagree, practice mutual respect and forbearance. Ground life in common worship inspired by music, baptism, communion. Sip those

sacred moments and savor a flavor of courage and hope. Raise a toast and say with me: the Spirit grows us!

Life is grace. Sweet and rich like caramel or café miel, or “sweepings tea”—that is, store brand basic as if leftover from the good stuff, swept off the floor. Truth is, from basic necessities to natural beauties so much of goodness in life is gift beyond anything we earn. Yes, we value hard work and accountability, as Paul says—all fruits of the Spirit moving among us. Think of roads, schools, ecological resources, intangible benefits of friends, family, strong community. Scan scenic vistas, enjoy flowers and all creatures great or small, review our personal successes and regrets. Paul writes, “I handed on to you what I received ... by the grace of God I am what I am.” Friends, sip, even gulp the sense of blessing, savor the awe, wonder, all nurturing humility. Raise a toast and swallow with me: life is grace!

Faith is gratitude. Call it a pumpkin spice latte, peppermint, or some other holiday concoction. My first (maybe only) one brought by someone who wanted to come chat seeking direction. Friends, the most basic recipe of faith can seem a contrast to culture and some theology we hear. We don’t prove ourselves worthy of Holy Love. Release fearful anxiety, stress about perfection. Check greedy expectation. See the goodness, respond gratefully. Even amid hard times, like praying in hospital, always begin with thanks for grace always around. We’re not naïve. Still, through gratitude, whatever negative turns positive. Sadness, loss, like Jesus lying entombed turns to resurrection delight. Fill our cup with gladness as scripture says and savor the deep joy, as Marilyn McEntyre writes, that confirms we know and believe most deeply, melting into unimaginable delight!ⁱ Raise a toast and fill our hearts: faith is gratitude!

Love generously. Here’s my best for last—any variation on chocolate mocha! Hiking and exploring out west with my son last summer, we got Ben and Jerry’s one

night. I didn't finish the pint of chocolate fudge brownie. So the next morning ... yep, whatever the basic brew we added a few big spoonfuls, scraping the cardboard ... wow! In a good way this time! Flowing from gratitude, it's whatever flavor most makes us want to share. It's the phrase in Scotland: the teakettle is always on. Loving generously, we extend the banquet to all people. Like Mary noting the wine has run out for others. Like Paul urging: by grace in us, so we proclaim and so others come to believe, sharing abundant life and joy in Christ. And friends, here's the gospel promise fulfilled. When we get beyond ourselves, our whims and needs, and sense the gratification of serving others, then we savor the greatest gift, the most blessed experience of divine peace. Raise a helping hand as if making a toast, every time we love generously by serving with Loaves and Fishes, Ministry with Community, CTV, provide food for our deacon meal train or refugee family, or chili cook off in a couple weeks. Like all the ways we nurture life in heart and mind and spirit through literacy training and Head Start, stitching and knitting, hammering and painting ... all lots of "warm fuzzies" as we heard today that will never let go of us or anyone else ... a heavenly wedding banquet of abundant life at which all people are invited, and in God's grace where the libations never run out.

Soon we'll be Jesus' guest at this banquet table, *the joyful feast of the people of God*—full of gospel promises, flavors of faith passed on to us, for us to savor. I wonder what flavor, what affirmation, what promise of Holy Loving Presence might you or I need to sip today? Even I'm savvy enough about coffee to know that we don't need to mix them all once. In living faith, sometimes we just need a cup of this or that on any given day.

One final story ... in the Marshall church I served before, Becky Davis was always around doing something—fixing this, painting this, serving in some other way. I knew she read and prayed, because occasionally we'd chat about some point of faith, but more than an ivory tower scholar, she lived our core beliefs. Through a

cancer diagnosis she got in her late 50s. Stage 4 ... who knows how long. So Becky saw every day as a gift, to be joy-filled as she got out and did something. For 20 more years. And she always had this stein-sized plastic coffee mug rinsed but never washed, the lid stained brown. Filling it, and when cold or too old dumping whatever was left over on plants around the church. No wonder they flourished so vibrantly! In that Spirit, I kept this cup from a recent conversation. Didn't want to just throw it away. This week it reminds me, I need another sip. Won't you join me? Let's raise a toast!

Thanks be to God. Amen.

ⁱ Marilyn McEntyre, *Word by Word: a Daily Spiritual Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016), 152.