

The Third Sunday After Epiphany

Year A

Saint Paul's Episcopal Church/La Iglesia Episcopal de la Resurrección

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“...and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him” (Mt 4:22). Mark and Luke tell similar stories, Luke’s story includes a miraculous act of a breaking net full of fish but the response to the call remains the same “Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.” John tells a different story, with the same ending. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed). (Jn 1:40-41. Why would these fishermen become fishers of people what was it about them and Jesus that propelled them to give up all to follow him? Jesus must have been one charismatic human being and they must have been ready to hear.

According to Israel Knohl, in his book, *The Messiah Confrontation*, the idea of a messiah, an anointed one, had been developing in Judaism since the time of King Ahaz and Isaiah, when Ahaz loses faith in God and the prophet and becomes a vassal of Assyria, sowing the seeds of the destruction of the two kingdoms. The prophets and the psalms later begin to speak of a messiah who will restore, either a messiah/king or a suffering servant type agent,

While Torah and Hosea are very skeptical of the idea of a king or messiah ability to restore and focused on a priestly role. Isaiah looked to the restoration of a glorious messiah/king in the line of David.

It was these two streams of thought, belief and values that had come down to the first century Jewish community which were represented by the Sadducees who did not believe in resurrection nor a messianic restoration

of a king. While the Pharisees, along with the Essenes and majority of the Jewish population did hold to the wisdom of resurrection and messiah/king to restore the Lord and the nation of Israel to their right place in the family of nations.

This is the cultural and wisdom system that Jesus was born into and turns on its head. We hear the struggles of the apostles, all through the gospels they are expecting a king and savior to lead them in taking out Rome. Instead, Jesus looks deeply into the Law and prophets and defying expected wisdom, comes to restore Israel into relationship with itself and with God. Not through violence, the world's way, but through justice, peace and love.

The loving community that Paul calls Corinth to “that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose” (1Cor.1:10) Next week we hear him turn the world's wisdom on its head, “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,

and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1 Cor1: 18-20)

The wisdom of the world, what John Kenneth Galbraith called “conventional wisdom” has been defined in many ways but verywellmind.com defines it this way “Conventional wisdom refers to commonly held and widely accepted ideas and beliefs. It can encompass ideas that are generally held by the majority of people as well as long-accepted expert opinions within a field or institution.” This form of wisdom can have benefits but it also produces drawbacks on the one hand it can help people understand the majority consensus and reach conclusions quickly. On the other hand, conventional wisdom can make it harder to think creatively and stifle alternative solutions to problems. Any time we

assume, without giving it much thought, we are usually relying on conventional wisdom. We have always done it that way.

I am very familiar with health care and how conventional wisdom operates in that institution. An example, peptic ulcers and gastritis, which everyone, for generations, knew came from stress and spicy and acidic foods. All one had to do was, lower your stress and change your diet. In 1982 *Helicobacter pylori*, a bacteria, was identified, by two Australian scientists Robin Warren and Barry J. Marshall, as a causative factor for ulcers and gastritis. The paper was poorly received and milk and stress reduction continued as the primary treatment. Then one of the scientists, Marshall, drank a petri dish, with a culture of organisms extracted from a patient with ulcers, and he developed gastritis shortly thereafter. Two weeks later his symptoms disappeared, but his wife insisted on an antibiotic, as bad breath, is a symptom of the disease. In 1997, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other agencies started an education push to inform all players about the link of *H pylori* and ulcers. In 2005 the scientists were awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine. And people say the Church is slow to change.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a good example of societies using and misusing worldly wisdom. The early responses, as we were trying to figure out what we were dealing with, were driven by past wisdom, on all fronts. Public Health actions were put into place, everything learned in past pandemics and epidemics, masks, social distancing, lockdowns, and personal protective measures, besides reinforcing universal precautions like hand washing, and surface cleaning. As we learned, in real time, how SARS CoV2 worked. Some of the directives were proven effective, some helpful and others unnecessary. Within a year we had vaccines and were figuring out what really needed to be done and what was excessive. And still the Sadducees and Pharisees were at it and what they believed was the proper response.

In our own context, we have ongoing contention that relates to conventional wisdom. It concerns the Eucharist and the use of the common

cup. The bread and the wine from at the common cup have deep roots in our theology of, the blessed community, coming together to share a meal as Jesus shared the bread and the cup, around the table. In his book, *The Eucharistic Way*, bishop John Baycroft writes of the common cup, “we drink from a common cup as a strong symbol of unity and our willingness to accept each other. We share our love and lives as we share the cup. The implications of this for fellowship and support in the local church, for relationships between rich and poor in communities and nations, and for justice between North and South and first and third world countries are enormous. The cup of love and unity is unavoidably a cup of sacrifice.”⁸ Sharing the cup is an intimate action that may make us feel uncomfortable at the best of times. The common cup reminds us in an incarnational way that we are in relationship with those with whom we share it.

Individual cups began being used in the latter part of the 19th century as germ theory began to be accepted. In some ways it was about hygiene. But in others ways it became clear as people immigrated to and around this country, that individual cups is a way of not sharing the cup with those who are different, especially, of a different color. As an aside the environmental cost of plastic is growing and is possibly having an existential cost, as well.

Finally, there is intinction, instinctively it must be safer for me to dip the wafer or bread into the cup than to drink from the common cup. Intinction began as a way of communing infants and disabled persons for who were unable to swallow liquids. Intinction was practiced by a communion minister who had cleansed their hands, placed a small amount of bread in a spoon, added a touch of wine to soften the bread, and then offered communion in a spoon to the communicant (the spoon being thoroughly cleansed afterward). In this practice, the communicant never touched the bread or wafer. This is not the intinction we practice.

Early in the HIV/AIDS epidemic, it is still with us, there was a move away from the common cup as with the SARS and MERS epidemics 20 years later. Several dioceses around the world, the CDC and the WHO all looked hard at

the practice of sharing the common cup, and all concluded that the drinking from the cup is, with a silver chalice, alcohol wine, and good use of a purificator, the cloth used by the person administering the chalice, the safest way to administer the wine, short of abstaining from the wine. The corona viruses along with influenza and RSV are all respiratory viruses and are shed in the air and transmission is by inhaling the virus so the person in front or beside of you is the threat in respiratory viruses, not the cup. HIV is passed by contaminated needles and bodily fluids. My first AIDS patient, in the late 1980's was infected in a blood transfusion, this is before they had identified the human immunodeficiency virus had been discovered so no way to screen for it as they do today. The contaminate of the cup, if it happens, has never been a known or proven transmission of a disease via the common cup.

Remember theologically for Episcopalians that reception in one kind, bread or wine is sufficient for full reception of the sacrament. Receiving by intinction, or "dipping," as that method, due to multiple fingers touching the rim and/or getting in the wine, have shown to be more problematic from a germ perspective than drinking from the common cup.

We believe that it is in common prayer, common praxis, including the common cup that we become the blessed community. And the body of Christ. I