

SHARING NEW WINE; SHARING MIRACLE
Isa. 62:1-5; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

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This Thursday will be the Chinese New Year's Day. The Year of the Monkey. I don't know how true the tradition still is. I remember when I was growing up in Taiwan, I really looked forward to the coming of the Chinese New Year more than the Western New Year. There was not much celebration at all for the Western New Year.

I looked forward to the Chinese New Year first of all because the school was off for 3 weeks though it came with lots of homework that we had to turn in after the winter break, including writing diary.

I remember most of the time, instead of writing diary, I ended up writing memoirs until midnight the night before school resumed. 3 weeks of memoirs wasn't too bad because I did memoirs for most summer vacations too which last about 2 months.

I also looked forward to the Chinese New Year because it was such a time of reunion. I would be able to see or visit a lot of relatives. As a child, we were able to receive good luck money wrapped in a small red envelope from all elders in the family. The money has to be brand new paper money, never been used before. People go to bank to trade in old money for new money for passing the red envelope.

It was such a celebration of newness. In the first year of the elementary school, we learned this rhyme in the Chinese language class, "Come, Come, Come! Sing together the New Year Song. New Year comes. Dress in new clothes. Wear new hats." (?!?!?! ????? ??, ???, ???, ???.)

Now you know why I liked Chinese New Year because, besides receiving new money in the red envelope, I knew I could dress in new clothes, new shoes, and wear a new hat. But there is a lot of work to get ready for the arrival of this New Year and to embrace and celebrate the newness brought forward to us.

A few days before the New Year arrive, everyone in the family, old and young, man or woman, has to work together to do a very thorough cleaning of the house, every door and window, every piece of furniture, every corner on the floor and ceiling got cleaned and polished up before the New Year.

New Year truly means NEW YEAR. Everything is new. The smell is new. The taste is new. The look is new. The newness of everything surrounding you renews your soul and excites you.

This is the kind of newness presented in the Third Isaiah as read today. The hope of newness cannot be silenced. The excitement for the coming of newness makes a soul restless.

After years of exile, after years of suffering and homesickness, after years of feeling abandoned by the Almighty God, the Israelite people look forward to the day when God's vindication will shine out like the dawn and when God's salvation will shine out like the burning torch.

This hope for newness is based on the fact conveyed to them by a messenger that God will call them by a NEW name. They shall be called "My Delight Is in Her" instead of "Forsaken." They shall be called "Married" instead of "Desolate." The Lord delights in Israelites.

Name identifies us. Name identifies everything, an animal, a plant, a vegetable, a street, a city, a church. To have a new name means to have a new identity. Everything that comes with the old name is gone. The new name signifies a new future. The new identity gives someone a new self-image.

In the Bible, a new name is given to signify a new beginning in someone's life. Abram became Abraham and Sarai became Sarah when God made the covenant with them that they would have a lot of offspring. Simon became Peter. Saul became Paul as they took on new mission in their lives.

The new name turns someone inside out and makes that person a new person.

Do you hunger and thirst for newness in life? Cleaning up the house, wearing new clothes and new shoes certainly will give you a feeling of newness. But what makes a person new does not come from the outside only, but also from deep within our soul.

It is something that only God can do. Only God can make us new from inside out.

To make a person new from inside out is a miracle. Often times, we think of miracle as the blind receives sight. The lame starts walking. The deaf can hear. Or the sick regains health. The dead becomes alive, in the case of Lazarus.

Something tangible. Something that we can see. Something that benefits our physical needs. Yet, miracle is more than those tangible benefits. We always say life itself is a miracle. A baby is a miracle. Love is also a miracle. There is not much rationality in love.

Whether it's the healing of physical illness, or life or love, miracle is not a miracle until it is shared. No one can live alone for the whole life. Life is to be shared. There would not be love if love is not shared.

A lot of people can perform magic. Magic is only for performance. Magic is an entertainment.

Miracle is not for performance. Miracle is not an entertainment.

If Jesus at the wedding in Cana only turns water into wine as a show, as an entertainment, water turning into wine would not be called a miracle. It is a miracle because the water becoming wine is distributed to people to drink. The water turning into wine brought much joy and wonder to the many who shared the feast at the wedding that day.

Jesus did it even in the way that nobody knew he did it. The servants did not know that the water has become wine. They only did what they were told to do by Jesus, "Fill the jars with water."

The chief steward did not know Jesus turned the water into wine. He thought that the bridegroom kept the good wine until the end of the banquet. The author of John did say that this miracle revealed Jesus' glory and his disciples believed in him. Only the disciples and his mother knew what was going on. Yet, everyone at the wedding banquet experienced the miracle even though they did not know how and when it happened or who made it happen.

The new wine was shared by many at the wedding. The miracle was shared. If the wine had not been shared, they would have been still sitting in those 6 jars. It would not have brought so much joy to those who attended the wedding feast. The miracle has to be experienced.

We all have different gifts. Gift or talent itself is a miracle given to us. Some of us can sing. Some of us can cook. Some of us have the skill of a handyman. Some of us know how to comfort people. Some of us write well.

There are many gifts among us. Same as miracle, if gifts are not shared, they are not gifts. In today's Corinthian reading, it says, "To each gift is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

Through the Spirit, we receive our different gifts. These gifts are gifts only when they are shared for the common good of our church and of our society. If the new wine from the water jars were not shared, no one would have had the chance to taste such good wine. There would not be a miracle but only magic.

If we keep our gifts, no one would know we have gifts. Miracle cannot happen if we hide our gifts. If we share our gifts for the common good of our brothers and sisters, we become a miracle and miracles will happen among us, I believe.

What would happen if things always stay the same and never change? What if everyday is a Sunday? What about we only sing the same old hymn every Sunday? What if every day is December 31? What about we never move beyond the year 2003?

Newness is such a gift given to us. We are able to learn new things, sing new hymns, meet new people, experience life in a new and different way. Newness is a miracle. I hope we embrace this newness in our lives, given to us in the beginning of a new year, in the beginning of our journey of faith together.

I hope we share our new hopes and dreams with one another.

I hope we use and share our gifts for the common good of our life together. Share the miracle in our lives together. Miracle is not miracle until it is shared and experienced in our common life, in our sharing together of our gifts.

I believe in our sharing the new wine and the miracle, miracle will continue to happen among us.