

# Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections  
based on this week's lectionary readings

January 17, 2016  
Second Week of Epiphany, Year C

**The readings this week:**  
• *Isaiah 62:1-5* • *Psalms 36:5-10*  
• *1 Corinthians 12:1-11* • *John 2:1-11*



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

## Blessing and the Christian Life

The Christian life is, or ought to be, an abundant life ever-rich in the centripetal blessings of God to God's people and the centrifugal blessings of God's people to God's world. This pattern reaches back to the earliest chapters of Genesis as Abram is blessed to be the father of a nation which will in turn be a blessing unto the world. The pattern is then displayed throughout the rest of the Scriptures, as God's people are blessed to be a blessing. The emphasis changes from time to time, as God's people struggle to find their way: at times, blessing is poured out upon them, while at others, God's people serve as a blessing, or are encouraged to fulfill their mission in blessing the nations around them.

In this week's lectionary readings, we find that both sides of blessing are emphasized: Isaiah 62:1-5 paints a beautiful picture of an Israel restored to her rightful place, God's delight dwelling within her, and her vindication spilling forth to the nations around her. Psalm 36:5-10 represents the unbridled gratitude of one living a life divinely blessed—an exuberant acclamation of God's steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness, and blessing which reach out and bring all people into its fold.

Paul speaks to his Corinthian church on matters of spiritual gifts, correcting a misguided hierarchy of giftedness by insisting that all are blessed by the one Spirit for the common good (1 Cor 12:7). Finally, our gospel text perhaps serves as a beautiful object lesson of God's blessings upon God's people: though it is normal to serve a lesser vintage later, God-in-Christ allows his blessings to spill forth in all their richness and beauty even at a later hour (John 2:10).

These two sides of God's blessing, the centripetal and the centrifugal, have not always been held in concert throughout the Christian tradition. Indeed, the Christian church has a spotty record in holding these two forms of divine blessing together (yet so, too, did

Israel of old; if nothing else, at least we are consistent). The contemporary church is no different: how often we focus our attentions solely inward, to the detriment (and at times ultimate demise) of our attention for outward giving, service, and blessing. As individual Christians, we have no shortage of idols and distractions, vying for our attention and redirecting us away from our calling to bless those around us. Must it be this way?

If the Scriptures are any sort of authority, we can and must affirm that this pattern need not continue. Throughout the story of God, God's people, and the redemption of Creation we see the binary of blessing upheld and displayed. As humans grafted into the story, family, and saving power of God, we not only have access to God's blessings for ourselves, we are conduits of God's blessing for others. This is a most enviable position, and one that this week's readings urge us to reflect upon. We were made to bless and be a blessing, to shine forth God's salvation for the world to see. Our gospel of God's reign is to be God's greatest vintage, the finest wine shared with the people we are blessed to share Creation with.

Blessed sisters and brothers, go out and be a blessing.

~ by Danny Yencich, [The Ekklesia Project](#)

**“We were made to bless and be a blessing...”**



# Reflecting on the Word



## 1st Reading: [Isaiah 62:1-5](#)

Picture yourself as a refugee returning home to the Lord. What do you experience? Isaiah has not kept silent about Judah's wickedness and her judgment. What motives does verse 1 reveal about his refusal to keep silent? How do verses 2-5 describe the new relationship between God and Zion? Pause and dwell on Zion's new names in verse 4. Hephzibah means "my delight is in her" and Beulah means "married." How do you respond to these expressions of God's feelings toward you? In verses 6-7, what will the role of Jerusalem's watchmen be? What is promised in verses 8-9? What role do celebratory processions and marches of witness have in the church today? [GraceLife Church](#)

## Psalm Reading: [Psalm 36:5-10](#)

How does this psalm describe God's character? How would you describe the relationship that David has with God? Can you have a relationship with God like David did? Why or why not? David observes that there is no fear of the Lord before the eyes of the wicked. From verses 5-9, what is it that they are blind to? We all have sinful thoughts from time to time. The wicked, however, do not reject such thoughts. Instead they choose to entertain them and then make a commitment to act upon them. What are some thoughts you have chosen to reject recently because you knew they were wrong? [Reaching Internationals](#) and [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

*I think that Mary knew this. Somehow, in the private days before his public ministry, she caught a glimpse of Jesus' difference. She had the long hours and short days of mothering when she pondered so much in her heart, and when she – like the rest of us – did her grappling with love and practical theology as she learned how to mother her children. I think it must have been in the midst of those days that Mary learned about the Christ in her Jesus. I wonder how she prepared her own heart for the risks ahead. For him. For others. For herself as well. There would be sacrifices. A first-born son was a woman's insurance policy, and she'd see that Jesus' calling would mean that things would be different for her, too. That would take some pondering. But, then at the wedding feast, she must have known that the time was right. So she got her Jesus organised to do what needed to be done. She interceded and prodded a little. She asked a little more of him than he was ready to give just at that moment. Because that's what mamas do. And grace abounds.*

~ An excerpt from [Good Wine and the Festal Life](#), by Katie Munnik, The Presbyterian Record

## Praying Toward Sunday

Was Puccini's  
music for his ears alone?  
Or was Starry Night only for Van Gogh's eyes?

Are discerners of spirits  
better than those who prophesy?  
Is it better to be a healer than a preacher?  
Was Mother Teresa more important  
than the Jesuit brother who  
held the door?

Is red a better than blue?

All gifts are  
from the same Spirit.  
They are each a part of the whole  
and given to each of us for each other  
or for the common good.

Lord, help us understand.  
Thank you for all  
gifts.

~ written by Anne Osdieck. Posted on [The Sunday Website of Saint Louis University](#)

## 3rd Reading: [1 Corinthians 12:1-11](#)

What has God shown you about your gifts and how you should use them in the church? What particular problem in the Corinthian church may have led Paul to offer the "test" in verse 3? What clue does Paul's test give us about the ultimate goal of spiritual gifts? What do verses 4-6 reveal about the unity and diversity of spiritual gifts? What can you do to help others in your group or church to discover their giftedness? How would you like to develop and exercise your spiritual gifts? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

## 4th Reading: [John 2:1-11](#)

This is the first recorded miracle of Jesus in John's gospel. Running out of wine is not a big deal today but it was a major crisis in Jesus' time. What modern day problems can you think of that are as serious to people today as was the problem of running out of wine in that day? Read Isaiah 62:1-5 and think about who the "you" might be in the passage. In your opinion what is the major point about God that the writer of John's gospel is trying to make by including this miracle? What do you know about God from this passage that you might not know if the story had been left out? Read Psalm 36: 5-10. What connections do you see between this Psalm and the wedding at Cana recorded in John 2:1-11? What does it mean in your life today that Jesus changed water into wine at the wedding at Cana? [Connections Group Discussions](#)