

**Christ Episcopal Church**

**2 Emerson Road**

**East Norwalk, Connecticut 06855**

**The First Sunday after Epiphany (C)**

**January 20, 2019**

**A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish**

**The Second Sunday after the Epiphany:**

**Year (C)**

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**DRAFT**

**“The best at the last”**

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## **The Holy Gospel**

### **according to John 2:1-11**

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars

with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Dear Lord, please give us the best wine of your Holy Spirit that we may do your will and celebrate in heaven with you. Amen.

Maybe this will give us some new hope, that Christ saves the best to the last. Jesus actually is not included into the party until there is a critical need, then He “comes through in flying colors”.

Sorry to say, most of our life is spent ‘doing it on our own’. It seems that we only turn to Christ when we finally recognize

nothing we can twist and shout and do:  
works.

I recently tried to learn several new things, first on my own, then when I was able to get someone to help me. Well, what I might or might not be able to do on my own, the ‘expert’ could do in about half the time. And it was more certain that what I then knew was actually the answer.

It’s a bit like reading a book on driving versus driving. We can be so intent on some detail that we overlook the ‘big picture’. We can have a myopic, near vision, of our progress, but only when we step back and look at the problem as a whole do we shout,

“Eureka” and find the answer. That is from the story of the ancient Greek mathematician Archimedes when he put the king’s crown into his bath water and saw it would displace a comparable amount of water from his bath. When he divided the weight of the crown by the volume of water displaced, Archimedes could calculate the density of the crown, and was able to show that some of the gold of the crown had been unscrupulously substituted by a dishonest goldsmith with silver. This became the universal Archimedes Principal. The size of an object can be determined by how much

water it displaces. And this is independent of the weight of the object or its shape.

Maybe we can find ‘eurekas’ in our lives. Why not. As this miracle in Cana testifies, Jesus came through ‘at the last’ to save the wedding feast. Why not plead our own case with Jesus? Why shouldn’t that work?

One, we have to state our need.

Two, we have to find Jesus in our prayers.

Three, we have to ask Jesus to intervene. And Jesus always does. Many times we can expect our prayers to be answered just as we prayed, but sometimes the answer is more in keeping with some strength’s we were not

taking into account, either as persons or as a congregation. We cannot omit someone from the solution that Christ wants to be included.

Also, we cannot want ‘second best’ since we are dealing with the “Holy One of God”, indeed, “God God’s self”, Son of God; so why would we want God to step down from God’s heavenly throne and give us something ‘second rate’? That is simply not in God’s character.

If we want ‘second best’, then just do it on our own. But when we involve God, then the quality becomes the best.

How many times have we tried to give God ‘our specifications’? Don’t we always do that, in fact. But when we come to the Master Craftsman, we should expect far beyond what we conceived of as a solution. I think that is one message of today’s miracle, that God really does know what is best. And perhaps God gives us the best and then let’s us eventually find out why God gave me this or God gave me that. God gives us time to discern what God has given us, I believe. And it often is in this discovery process that we learn how great our God really is.

Then there is what we might call a subtlety. We do indeed have to do something. The servants had to pour water into the big water jars. The jars didn't just fill themselves, but the liquid had to be water that Jesus would turn to wine. Jesus did not turn air into wine, or marble into wine; no, Jesus turned water into wine. So perhaps our task is to find out what God wants to do in order to make the miracle not simply out of air. We are the hands, feet, minds, and eyes that God will use in doing a miracle for us and miracles for others. So, we are indeed important, but what we do is not the specific miracle that will result, but

we have to use our miraculous minds, hands, and feet; we are indeed marvels to behold when one gets into the nitty-gritty of what actually makes us 'tick'. We are such improbable beings that it is almost laughable that we, our bodies, do work. For example, our marvelous kidneys work this way: we have descending and ascending Loops of Henle that control our blood pressure by controlling how much sodium chloride there is in our blood. The descending loop of Henle comes first. The descending loop of Henle's job among other things eliminates excess water from our urine back into our blood; but it holds back the sodium; then

there is a 'kink' at the bottom between the descending and ascending Loop of Henle to keep their different salt concentrations from easily mixing; the kink is followed by the ascending Loop of Henle that is permeable to salt but not to water, so the ascending Loop of Henle adjusts the amount of salt to be removed from our urine. But these two loops of Henle are apparently so good at what they do, that sometimes they can overdo it a bit, allowing too much water to escape or too much salt; so the final mechanism for balancing the salt content of our blood is to do a final fine adjustment on the aqueous concentration of sodium

chloride in our blood at the very top of the ascending Loop of Henle in what is called the “distal tubule”. So, the whole process of adjusting our blood pressure is a three-step process: first, get rid of too much water; then, get rid of too much salt; and finally finely adjusting the final salt concentration. And our marvelous kidneys do that millions of times again and again during our lifetimes, usually without fail. When something happens to go a little bit awry in this balancing act, we may have to take a diuretic or some other pharmaceutical to chemically adjust our blood pressure; but these medications generally depend on

having a working kidney and its Loops of Henle.

Possibly over the ages living organisms had to first adjust to high salt concentrations in the oceans, then to low salt concentrations on land, so we have two specialized types of membranes in our kidneys to keep the final result in the livable range; and we have a fine tuning mechanism for it all. An odd mammal is the desert mouse who can live with about three times the concentration of sodium in his blood that can we humans. He can even live drinking ocean water, which is toxic to us humans since our kidneys cannot adjust to the high salt concentrations of

ocean water. But the desert mouse is hundreds of miles from any currently existing ocean. Isn't life amazing?

Retired Lutheran pastor Robert Sims tells this story:

“I read an article recently about one of our major denominations. They were meeting in a convention in Omaha, Nebraska. The worship planners wanted to find a way for participants to express the joy, gladness, and thanksgiving that should be a natural part of worship. Knowing that they were a conservative and formal group and would not give free or spontaneous

expression to their feelings, a plan was devised to give every worshipper a helium-filled balloon. Along with the balloons, instructions were given that at any point in the worship should someone be moved by the Spirit and desire to express in some outward way the enthusiasm, excitement in their souls, they should joyfully release their balloons that they might ascend as an expression of praise and gratitude. The worship began. Sure enough, during the service balloons began to ascend all over the worship center. Astonishingly, however, when worship was over, fully one-third of the people were still clutching tightly their

balloons. We can only assume that either the worship was dead, or the people were dead, or perhaps both. We are called by God to be his living people, but somehow, we must learn to give some sign of life, some evidence to the world and to ourselves that we are alive, that the power of God is active, moving, and stirring within us.”

[http://day1.org/480-gods\\_living\\_people](http://day1.org/480-gods_living_people)

The wedding ceremony and celebration that followed became the impetus for Jesus to accomplish his very first miracle. He did not end war. He did not end famine. Jesus did not end disease. He simply helped a newly married couple begin a joy-filled life

by making sure the guests at their wedding had enough wine for their wedding party.

I think Jesus is indeed in tune with what makes us happy, not with what we think should happen or what might happen or what could happen. Jesus is a “happening person”, knowing our needs before we are in deep trouble; knowing what will make us happy; knowing what will make those around us joyful. And this scenario causes Jesus to do his first miracle.

Where in your life do you need a miracle, something quite tangible, something quite emotionally satisfying? Turn to Jesus even in your time of sadness

or lack of joy. He will find a way to create joy that you probably didn't deserve, couldn't imagine, but desperately needed. That will be Jesus doing that miracle for you.

Amen.

## Description:

Jesus knows what will make us joy-filled.

Only ask, and the miracle may be yours.

## Tags:

Wedding, Cana, marriage, couple, joy,

kidney, miracle, ask, receive, salt,

Archimedes, crown, water, vessels

**A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish**

**St. Luke's Episcopal Church**

**85 Greenway South**

**Forest Hills, Queens, New York 11375**

**The Second Sunday after the Epiphany:**

**Year (C)**

**January 17, 2016**

**DRAFT**

**“The noble wine”**

**A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish**

**The Holy Gospel**

**according to John 2:1-11**

Dear Lord, please give us the good wine of your Holy Spirit that we may celebrate in heaven with you. Amen.

Jesus' mother diagnosed the problem astutely. The party needed wine. We assume that from her confident comment to Jesus that Mary had experienced Jesus' ability to work miracles around his carpenter shop and her home. So it was probably natural for her to turn to him for this miracle. However, it seems to have been his first public sign of his divinity during his adulthood, and Jesus was not accustomed to

having any public acclaim for his abilities. Thus his seeming reproach to his mother was likely a 'coming of age' issue for him. He could foresee his destiny, and this sign he was being asked to work would begin his hurtle onto his path to the cross.

As a former chemist, I can see a formula that could be readily developed that says that three molecules of water ( $H_2O$ ) plus two molecules of carbon dioxide ( $CO_2$ ) from a person's breath could at least theoretically be converted to one molecule of ethanol ( $C_2H_5OH$ ) and three molecules of oxygen ( $O_2$ ). Such a chemical process occurs in nature daily when green plants

convert carbon dioxide and water to sugars and oxygen, and yeast microorganisms convert sugars to ethanol. So the practical as well as theoretical process to form wine from water and ambient carbon dioxide is actually a natural process. The miracle as I see it is that Jesus miraculously catalyzes processes that usually take both complex plants and simple organisms to do normally in nature. But the process does work in nature all the time in our world. In other words, what Jesus did would not be an impossible task for nature. The speed and manner in which he seems to have done it is the “aha” factor. Yet then again the creator

of heaven and earth surely created the processes green plants and yeast use in “fixing” carbon dioxide and in fermentation. One can calculate that it would take a hundred wedding guests about eight minutes to breathe out the requisite amount of carbon dioxide for this miracle. Thus Jesus simply reversed what our human bodies do normally. Surely the person who could make a dead person live could reverse a metabolic process that occurs naturally. And, wala! Wine! Furthermore in this simple “nature” miracle we have foreshadowed the raising of Lazarus, the last

miracle or “sign” Jesus performs in this gospel.

I actually calculated the amount of carbon dioxide in air that would be required for this miracle, and it about how much carbon dioxide is in this sanctuary today, about 0.035 percent of the air in this space is carbon dioxide, believe it or not. Most of the air we breathe is nitrogen, but it is the 20 percent of oxygen that we use to live.

I calculate that the six stone water jars contained between about 120 to 180 gallons, and since a normal wine bottle is about a sixth to an eighth of a gallon, the amount of wine Jesus made was about one thousand

bottles of wine. That sounds like a huge amount, and it is, but for the guests in a wedding party, for a medium size party, for a day it would probably take as many as one or two hundred bottles a day; the normal average wedding feast of the first century was about a week long, so there was actually only about enough wine for a five or ten day feast; so Jesus made just enough for what was needed for the wedding feast actually, but it was a very ample supply, with probably some bottles left over for the wedding couple to use another time.

Jesus said he came to give us abundant life, life overflowing with reasons to live and be productive. We cannot live out of scarcity but out of God's promise to be with us always and to the end. We have our life because of the mercy of God. We live and move and have our being because God made us in God's very own image. We are the apple of God's eye. We are precious and important in God's sight. So we need to treat others as being just as precious and important as we want to feel ourselves.

Yet still sometimes our lives run down into empty places and we need to hear the consoling message of Jesus in our ears. He

fills us with new hope and joy and expectation. Jesus adds the wine into our jars, the joy and peace of living a life for and with him.

The quantity of wine Jesus produced as the first sign of his messiahship was enormous--as much as 180 gallons of wine, nearly a ton of wine, very impressive! If you figure about four ounces of wine per person, that would be enough wine for 5,760 people. Now that is what I call a real wedding party! Probably what is being foreshadowed is that the necessary wine to go with the feeding of the five thousand was

also in Jesus' capabilities. Recall that Jesus provided multiplication of the loaves and the fish, but what did the people drink in that miracle of the feeding of the five thousand? I would suggest that Jesus could easily have provided the finest wine to go with the bread and the fish. It only would take six large jars of water, along with the five barley loaves and the two fish.

This week we saw two thirds of the Primates of the Anglican Communion vote to sanction the Episcopal Church because its General Convention last year voted to change the Marriage Canon to allow the

marriage of same sex couples. A few weeks later last year the Supreme Court of the United States made that the law of the land. So we and a few other countries now allow same sex marriages.

I posted on the Episcopalians on Facebook page yesterday a response that what happened was not unexpected since most of the Anglican world and of the countries of the world do not allow same sex marriages, including England from which the leader of the Anglican Communion hails--the Archbishop of Canterbury is appointed by the Queen who does not believe in LGBT marriages--and some other

Archbishops in the Anglican Communion are not at all affirming of anyone who is LGBT. I received one question about the theology and biblical basis for what General Convention did. Years of debate had focused on these issues, but in view of Martin Luther King's Day tomorrow, I am giving one relevant answer here:

Many Episcopalians on the Facebook page were saddened by the action of the Anglican Archbishops, but I noted there that in most of the world there is no support by the Anglican Archbishops or country political leaders for same sex marriages. But as you may know we have a new

Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, an African American who has been very much supportive of what the recent General Convention did. He noted that as a descendant of slaves, he was very familiar with his forebears being excluded and marginalized in society. And he has strongly defended the General Convention actions even though now our particular branch of the Anglican Communion has been excluded and marginalized.

His particular family issue, which will be highlighted tomorrow at the Martin Luther King, Jr., celebrations in our country, was

the abolishment of discrimination based on race.

However, biblically there are far more scriptures that support slavery than that do call for the emancipation of slaves.

<https://www.openbible.info/topics/slavery>

[Here are those passages supporting slavery:

1. Leviticus 25:44-46 “As for your male and female slaves whom you may have: you may buy male and female slaves from among the nations that are around you. You may also buy from among the strangers who sojourn with you and their clans that are with you, who have been born in your land, and

they may be your property. You may bequeath them to your sons after you to inherit as a possession forever. You may make slaves of them, but over your brothers the people of Israel you shall not rule, one over another ruthlessly.”

2. Ephesians 6:5 ESV “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,
3. Colossians 4:1 “Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.
4. Exodus 21:20-21 “When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a

rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged. But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money.

5. Titus 2:9-10 “Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.
6. 1 Peter 2:18 “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.

7. Exodus 21:26-27 “When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free because of his eye. If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth.
8. Deuteronomy 23:15 “You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you.
9. Exodus 21:1-36 ESV “Now these are the rules that you shall set before them. When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. If he

comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out alone. But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' ...

10. Deuteronomy 24:7 "If a man is found stealing one of his brothers of the people of Israel, and if he treats him as a slave or sells him, then that thief shall die. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

11. Deuteronomy 23:15-16 “You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. He shall dwell with you, in your midst, in the place that he shall choose within one of your towns, wherever it suits him. You shall not wrong him.
12. Colossians 3:22 “Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.
13. Ephesians 6:8-10 “Knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he

is a slave or free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

14. 1 Timothy 6:1-2 “Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the

better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these things.

15. Acts 16:16-18 “As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the

name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

16. Isaiah 14:2 “And the peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them in the Lord's land as male and female slaves. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.

17. Genesis 9:25 God said, “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.”

18. Revelation 13:16 “Also it [the beast from the earth] causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free

and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead,

19. Exodus 21:7-11 “When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has broken faith with her. If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter. If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. And if he does not do these three things

for her, she shall go out for nothing,  
without payment of money.

20. Isaiah 14:1-3 “For the Lord will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land, and sojourners will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob. And the peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them in the Lord's land as male and female slaves. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them. When the Lord has given you rest from your pain and

turmoil and the hard service with which you were made to serve,

21. Ezra 9:9 “For we are slaves. Yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.

22. Proverbs 22:7 “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender.

23. 1 Samuel 4:9 ESV “Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you

become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight.”

24. Deuteronomy 28:68 “And the Lord will bring you back in ships to Egypt, a journey that I promised that you should never make again; and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer.”]

[Page 17]

(There a total of 24 Biblical passages supporting slavery.)

And there indeed are more Bible verses supporting slavery than not: [See below:

1. Galatians 5:1 “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.
2. Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
3. 1 Corinthians 7:21 “Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)
4. 1 Peter 2:16 “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a

cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

5. Leviticus 25:39 “If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave:
6. John 8:36 “Jesus said, “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.
7. Jeremiah 34:8-9 “The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to make a proclamation of liberty to them, that everyone should set free his Hebrew

slaves, male and female, so that no one should enslave a Jew, his brother.

And then there is

8. \* Mark 10:42-45 “And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man

came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

And

9. Job 31:13-15 “If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant, when they brought a complaint against me, what then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him? Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?

And

10. Leviticus 25:55 \* “For it is to me that the people of Israel are servants.

They are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

But contrast:

11. John 15:15 Jesus said, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

12. Romans 8:15 “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ]

[P. 18] (So there are only 12 Bible passages speaking specifically against slavery of which in two\* in Jesus' words the servanthood is to God or the gospel.)

Thus by my count there is, by a margin of 24 to 12, by two to one, there are more biblical supporting the existence of slavery than there are against slavery.

But in no verse does Jesus specify he is specifically for or against slavery.

In like manner, there are many more verses in the Bible foreswearing LGBT's than not. But Jesus himself never takes a stand one way of the other.

[Page 19] So our part of the Anglican Communion has come out against discrimination of people who are LGBT as have some others of the Anglican Communion, but we all are in the minority in the Anglican Communion by about one to two.

But just based on the weight of Biblical evidence, slavery would not have been abolished, and discrimination against LGBT people would not cease.

But Episcopalians have in their wisdom seen in the weight of Jesus' teachings that we are specifically to love one another as we

love ourselves, and that we also are to love even our enemies.

[Page 20] Now, I don't think most Americans think of people who are LGBT are at all their enemies, nor since the early or mid-nineteenth century that American would tolerate slavery, although it took a civil war to define the slavery issue, and the Civil Rights Act to better define discrimination based on race, and Martin Luther King, Jr., to bring home to all Americans that we fundamentally are not going to discriminate based on race. And now, in a less blood-letting way, Americans by their Supreme Court decision last year

are no longer discriminating about who will and who will not be married based on sexual orientation. And The Episcopal Church has been somewhat of a religious leader on trying to break down the walls against LGBT people modeled a bit after how Martin Luther King, Jr., was able to bring our nation's conscience to see how slavery will no longer be tolerated in this country. But the road to freedom is never smooth or easy.

[Page 21] But as in today's Gospel, Jesus took the most common of things, water, to show how he can transform all things. And we in The Episcopal Church believe that

Jesus will affirm what we are trying to do in our denomination to change the waters of discrimination into the noble ideal wine of redemption and peace.

But we are not Jesus, so we have continually to rely on his grace and his mercy to be able to change the world into a more loving and less discriminatory place. But many of the forces within Christianity as well as the religious forces outside of Christianity are pitted against us as Episcopalians who see our Christian faith redeeming some of the failures of humankind that does not believe in loving

our neighbors as we love ourselves and loving even our enemies.

[Page 22] Jesus ultimately faced the cross of Calvary to prove he was right all along, and by that one sacrifice of himself we all who believe in him are given the promise of life eternal with Our Father in Heaven.

But it still depends first on us to fill the jars of human hearts with love. Then Christ will again work his great miracle and change all our hearts into his ideal wine of social justice, peace, and above all, love for one another. We can put our trust in that.

Amen.

