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Second Sunday after Epiphany
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Resistance and Transformation

Stories from the Bible often feel far removed from us, don't they? We hear names of people and places that we can't quite envision, and references to customs and practices that aren't largely visible today. I always enjoyed reading and hearing stories in the bible, but it wasn't until later in life that I recognized my own experience in the stories. It was in seminary and we were studying the call stories of major biblical figures. In each call story, at the beginning God makes an appearance, confronts and commissions someone to a task. All of this was making sense so far, until we got to...the objection. Here I found out that most of the heroes of our faith have an objection as a part of their story, a resistance to the call. This information both caught me off guard AND resonated with me because I recalled my own resistance, my reason "why not", when I first realized I was called to ministry. My immediate, very visceral, internal response to the call was: "God, you have the wrong person. I can't be ordained as a queer person, and besides, I'm too rough around the edges." In that moment, I believed my resistance was the end of the story. I thought I had the last word and it was a hard "no."

So what are some of the excuses used in the Bible? Gideon: 'Pray, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family'.
Moses: 'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt!.'
Jeremiah: 'Ah, Lord Yahweh! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth!.'
And in today's gospel, we hear one from Jesus himself: "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."

I imagine most of us can identify with these type of statements. That internal dialogue that tells us we're not cut out for the task, the suspicion that there is someone better suited for God's work. This objection is part of our common human story.

I first heard of Marie Kondo a couple of years ago when I picked up her book "The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up." Kondo's categorical method of home organizing suggests only keeping items that "spark joy." In January, Netflix released a show called Tidying Up showcasing Kondo's method in American homes. Immediately after its release, I began to get text messages from friends, my social media feeds filled with tweets and memes. "Can you believe this lady?" "Keep your tidy, spark joy hands off of my book piles" or the recent NYT article titled "Marie Kondo, Tidying Up and the Ruthless War on Stuff." These are extreme reactions to a small, unassuming Japanese woman who treats decluttering as more of a spiritual practice than anything else.

We learn a lot about ourselves and others in these moments of extreme resistance - what we value, what we fear. In our world and in our time, our resistance can be made known through multiple platforms, on the internet, across the globe in a matter of seconds. Our "no" can be claimed and heard loud and clear in the small things (like a Netflix show) or in larger issues.

As much as resistance plays into our personal growth and spiritual growth, it also impacts communal growth. Martin Luther King, Jr., whom we celebrate tomorrow, believed that resistance or healthy tension is necessary for societal change. In *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, he writes, "...I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth."

The world today feels more tense than I have ever experienced in my lifetime. That may be different for those of you who lived through the Civil Rights Era and other historically trying times. I find hope in believing that constructive resistance is an important part of the story, but it's not the end of the story. It is in the events after the tension that we see true transformation happen.

Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine is one of three mysteries celebrated during Epiphany along with the visit of the Magi and Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. In each instance Jesus' divine nature is made manifest to a new group of people serving as a sign that he is the Son of God. We define epiphany as a manifestation, a profound moment of divine revelation. While we celebrate these epiphanies as a great culmination, we must also recognize that they are the beginning of something new and unfamiliar. The event at the wedding in Cana will spur Jesus on the path of an impactful, vital, world-changing ministry, but this path also includes derision, rejection, and crucifixion. We see a human side of Jesus that resists because somehow he knows that the transformative path will not be easy.

So what comes after resistance in the call story? Two amazing things. The assurance of God's presence AND a sign that serves as a "public credential of commission." The END of the story, which really becomes the beginning of a new story, is one full of hope and evidence of God's presence.

I know some of us here are wine connoisseurs, some drink it socially, some of us stay away from it for a variety of reasons. Wine elsewhere in the bible is a symbol of God's lavish grace and desire to see humans whole and thriving. Likewise, in John, wine represents something much greater than a festive beverage. It serves as assurance that God is present, and not just in a small chalice or even a bottle or two but God is abundantly present in nearly 200 gallons of water changed to wine. It serves as a sign that Jesus is both divine and human. It serves as a sign of the transformative power of Christ in our lives.

Our story, like Jesus', continues well past our places of resistance. God's abundant grace is made manifest (or revealed) in our lives, in our world, and it transforms us in radical and unexpected ways.

At this table we are surrounded by a community filled with various gifts of the Spirit. Come, eat and drink. Abundance will flourish as we live into our baptismal call, and we will be changed into the body of Christ for our world.