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“Jesus returned to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine” (John 4:45).

*Isa 65:17-21; John 4:43-54*

We enter the fourth week of Lent following Laetare Sunday, a brief respite from the penitential season to remind us that the Gospel is always about joy.

Today’s first reading from Isaiah is pure poetry that soars with a vision of the future when God will create new heavens and a new earth. It is good news since so much of the underlying sorrow in the world mood these days is the realization of what a mess we have made of this world and even the heavens in an atmospheric sense. Yet, God never ceases to offer hope and to point to a time when peace and justice will prevail, if only we hear the invitation and respond.

Jesus comes again to Cana in Galilee, where he made the water wine, his first sign and one of the major themes of John’s Gospel. The waters used in purification rites will become the wine of gladness at the wedding of the Lamb and his bride, the Beloved Community of the church. A second sign occurs in Cana when Jesus heals the son of the royal official from a distance.

We have heard a lot about social distancing lately. The rabbi of the synagogue in New York City that had been targeted by a knife-wielding racist recently said that social distancing should be replaced by “physical” distancing during the pandemic, because the one thing we need now is social cohesion, not distance. Only together, in solidarity and mutual respect, will we get through this crisis.

So, Jesus heals the official’s child from a physical distance with a personal presence that is so intimate that it brings the boy back from the point of death. His father is so moved when he realizes that at the very hour Jesus had spoken the child had revived, his whole household became believers. If he was an official in the royal court of Herod, this conversion would have had real impact.

We began Lent in solidarity, and even if we are now isolated and distant from one another physically, we can still be one community of faith and love. Jesus is never distant, as near as our next prayer. Let us pray for healing, especially for the many in this world who are sick and for those who will die today. They will see and know the new heavens Isaiah witnessed. It is for us who live on to work to bring about the new earth God wants for us.

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