

Sermon – Third Sunday of Epiphany
Genesis 14:17-20; Revelation 19:6-10; John 2:1-11

This miracle of the turning of water into wine is placed at the beginning of John's Gospel and is the only Gospel to report it – revealing God's glory and grace through Jesus – so much so that the disciples there and then put their faith in him. And of course, it takes place on the 'third day' and as we know today – another manifestation of glory and miracle would take place on the third day of another time – when the light and glory of the world would be revealed in the new life of the Easter promise – the one that we will begin to symbolically journey towards as we turn away from the Christmas story and move towards Lent next week in the celebration of Candlemas....

Like the visitation from the Wise Men and the Baptism of Jesus, this miracle also reveals Jesus as Messiah – the King of Kings – Lord of Lords – Epiphany is a manifestation and these events are the manifestation of the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God.

The water and the wine of the wedding miracle – and the water and the wine mixed during Communion both symbolise the humanity and divinity of Jesus.

Today we read about that mysterious figure of the priesthood of Melchizedek – a continual and eternal priesthood- priest of the God Most High – he is from the house of the Davidic king, not from a line of priests from the tribes of Judah or Levi – 'a priest for ever' and this 'line of David' priesthood is the royal root from which Jesus comes to us – our great high priest forever. Christ, which means anointed – is the leader of the 'priesthood of all believers' – believers that Jesus is the Messiah – the anointed – and the great high priest of all time.

And it is in the believing that we will see the abundant grace and transforming love overflowing from the jars holding the richest and best wine – a transforming grace that takes the ordinary of water and makes it holy and fit for the purpose of bestowing the blessings of abundant grace – whether it be in the celebration and hospitable wine of a wedding or in the blessing of water that baptises us spiritually with new wine – new life. No matter what is going on – no matter how flat things seem to be – a turning to and believing in Jesus is enough to bring forward the transforming grace.

Now, one of the less obvious signs in this story might be the fact that the purification clay jars are six in number – the perfect spiritual number of the Jewish tradition back then was seven – but we are only hearing about six jars – but these six jars are holding a vast amount of water – more than the small amount needed for purification – and there we have another sign of the overwhelmingly generous heart of God, made known through Jesus

The symbolic importance of weddings of the day is that the ceremony represents the coming of God's kingdom – this wedding – while not as spectacular as the raising to life of Jesus's dead friend Lazarus is nonetheless powerful in that this third day miracle is a heralding in of the Easter promise – it is the heralding in of the heavens opening and God ascending and descending as we heard in the calling of Nathanael last week – and it is also telling us that while we are witnessing a great message – Jesus' hour hasn't yet come – greater things will happen – and in trust and faith of that, Mary tells them all 'Do whatever he asks...'

'Do whatever he asks...'

And so we come to our place in this miracle....

What is your place in this miracle – where in your life would you like to dare to believe that you are part of God's loving plan – a plan to bring you abundant and rich life in its fullness – which doesn't by the way – mean that the human obstacles of life won't happen but that the richness will come in how to meet those challenges – and how to enjoy the joyful up-times that balance the down-times....

The narrator of the reading from Revelation might help us as he speaks into the great 'marriage of the Lamb'

That reading tells us how the many waters cry Hallelujah! We are invited to the overflowing abundance of the Hallelujah-waters-of-life marriage supper of the Lamb. It is all ready. The bride is adorned with fine

linen... And as the people of God, we are the bride of the Lamb – and all that we do in the name of Jesus are symbolised by the clothes of fine linen – the deeds of the saints – it is we who are blessed...

And in each of the readings – in one way or another – we are shown how we can be part of the great miracle story of all time – we can bow down before God and worship.

Abram gave a tenth of what he had. The witness in Revelation was told to worship God – not fellow men – but to worship God in the spirit of Jesus.

And the wedding guests were told – by Mary – to ‘do whatever he tells you’ – and in a huge act of faith they did exactly that, and like us today being asked to have faith in a lighter world when everything is so dark, so they had faith that Jesus could help them – although turning water into wine was probably not even remotely in their imagining, but - as the glory and rejoicing came to light with just that happening – along with the wonder of seeing how the abundance and richest and best wine had been saved to last – ‘the disciples believed him...’

.... I leave us with an abridged version of Malcolm Guite’s lovely poem ‘An Epiphany at Cana’ – from his book ‘Sounding the Seasons’

Here’s an epiphany to have and hold,
A truth that you can taste upon the tongue,
No distant shrines and canopies of gold
Or ladders to be clambered rung by rung,

Better than waters of some outer weeping,
That leave you still with all your hidden sin,
Here is a vintage richer for the keeping
That works its transformation from within.

Here and now, amidst your daily living,
You can taste and touch and feel and see,
The spring of love, the fount of all forgiving,
That flows when you need it, rich, abundant, free.

May your week in these testing times be rich with special moments of abundant and overflowing acts of grace...

Amen.

Revd Jacqueline Drake-Smith

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