

June 10th 2018 Sermon

The Wine and the Whip

First Reading: Revelation 19:6-9

Text: John 2:1-11

John is not so much interested in the history of Jesus but in the mystery of Jesus. He wants us to ask the question; "Who is this Jesus?"

As the reader continues his journey through the gospel account he or she will come to understand and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the Living God.

Part A.

Before we say anything about the significance of this miracle as a sign pointing to what Jesus came to be and do, let's take a brief moment to look at the setting.

According to St Jerome Cana was a small village that could be seen from Nazareth.

Mary's first-hand knowledge that the wine had run out would seem to indicate that she may have had something to do with the wedding arrangements.

Some ancient manuscripts indicate that Mary may have been the sister of the groom's mother.

Others suggest that the groom may have even been the Apostle John himself, making John, Jesus cousin.

Mary's husband, Joseph, had in all likelihood died by this time. It thus seems natural that Mary would turn to her oldest son who she knew was the promised Messiah.

In first century Palestine wedding celebrations went for a week after the initial wedding banquet.

The bride and groom did not go on a honeymoon but kept open house for that week and were treated as the King and Queen of their new home by all the village.

We see this practice still carried over into Orthodox Church weddings, where the bride and groom have crowns placed on their heads during the wedding ceremony.

In country areas the whole village was invited to the wedding banquet. Jewish wedding etiquette considered it a great embarrassment for the couple if the food or wine ran out.

So Mary goes to Jesus and tells him about the situation. (v3)

In response Jesus replies, "Mother is that really our problem?" (v4)

The theologian William Barclay translates Jesus words spoken in Aramaic like this:

"Don't worry mother, you don't quite understand what is going on, leave things to me, and I will settle them in my own way."

It reminds me of St Peter's words in his first epistle, "Caste all you cares on Jesus for he cares for you."

Jesus is keenly aware that if he does something miraculous here his public ministry will begin and there will be no turning back.

But after living with Jesus for 30 years Mary knows her son well.

She knows he will do the right thing by the young couple, thus saving them from embarrassment.

Mary does something we can learn from when it comes to our own prayer life.

She comes to Jesus and explains the situation to him, but notice, she doesn't tell Jesus how to solve it.

She simply tells the servants to "do whatever he tells you to do." (v5)

When we bring our prayers and petitions before God, like Mary we should tell him our need, and then trust that He will meet that need in his own way and time.

We know what happens next. Jesus turns the water into wine and the celebrations continue.

Of course the servants and the disciples know what has happened.

The other guests are oblivious to this miracle and continue their eating and drinking none the wiser. The disciples are left to ponder Jesus and wonder who he is.

So is that the end of the story? Not by half.

John is not so much interested in the history of Jesus but in the mystery of Jesus. He wants us to ask the question; "Who is this Jesus?"

As the reader continues his journey through the gospel account he or she will come to understand and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the Living God.

So in the time that remains to us let us spend a few moments and discover the deeper significance in these events.

Firstly, the wine.

We need to understand that in ancient Israel wine was the symbol for joy. One Rabbi wrote "Without wine there is no joy."

Of course that joy did not imply drunkenness which was considered to be a great disgrace.

In the O.T. an abundance of good wine was a sign of the joyous arrival of God's new era; the eschatological coming of the kingdom of God.

We see this in a number of Old Testament passages.

Is 25:6 "In Jerusalem, the Lord of heaven's armies will spread a wonderful feast for all the people of the world it will be a delicious banquet with clear, well-aged wine and choice meats."

Amos 9:13 "The time will come says the Lord, when the grain and grapes will grow faster than they can be harvested. Then the terraced vineyards on the hills of Israel will drip with sweet wine."

Joel 3:18 "In that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk."

The fact that Jesus turns upwards of a thousand litres of water into wine is a sign of the abundance of Joy that is to accompany the establishment of God's kingdom under Jesus.

Again listen to what Barclay has to say.

“Without Jesus life is dull, and stale and flat; when Jesus comes into life, life becomes vivid and sparkling and exciting. Without Jesus life is drab and uninteresting. With Jesus life is thrilling and wonderful and exciting. Whenever Jesus comes into a person’s life it is like water turning into wine.”

The Empty Jars.

I wonder if you noticed that there are six jars used for ceremonial washing and that they were empty?

They are symbolic of the emptiness of the Old Testament religious rituals. The number six is the number of man because he was made on the sixth day.

Man-made rituals cannot put us right with God. Only God can put us right with himself through Jesus.

Jesus comes to establish a new covenant between us and God. A covenant that will surpass the old one.

Therein lies John’s comments about the abundance and quality of the water turned to wine. The latter is better than the former.

Where there is deep seated emptiness in a person’s life Jesus comes to bring fullness. In John 10:10 we read Jesus words, “I have come that you may have life and have it in abundance.”

I find it interesting that the first miracle God performed through Moses was a sign of God’s judgement on Egypt. He turned water into blood.

Jesus first miracle is a sign of God’s blessing when he turns water into wine.

One last symbol before we conclude. Notice the context of the miracle. A wedding banquet.

On numerous occasions in the New Testament Jesus describes heaven as a wedding banquet.

Weddings usually evoke great joy and celebration.

Perhaps Jesus is wanting to remind us that what lies ahead of us is like the joy and celebration of a wedding banquet that never ends.

While researching for this sermon I turned the page of an old bible and found a little yellow feather.

The feather belonged to a sweet little cockatiel we once owned name Rosie.

It reminded me of all those we have left behind as we travel through life; or perhaps in light of the feast of Cana maybe we should say that they have left us behind.

I thought of Mary who must have felt a pinch of sadness that her beloved Joseph was no longer with her to share the occasion.

The miraculous sign done by Jesus at Cana gives us hope.

Preparations are already underway for the marriage feasts of the Lamb, where we who trust in Jesus, will meet those who have gone before us.

I don't know about you, but I can hardly wait for that day.

In the mean time we keep leaning on the promises of God, and resting in the arms of his loving embrace.