

## Epiphany 2: Jesus changes water to wine

St Stephen, Canonbury

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2016

### Prayer

Come Holy Spirit, by the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ. Amen.

### Introduction

Stuart spoke last week about the baptism of Jesus and the story in Luke's Gospel of the audible voice of God intervening. Stuart asked, 'Where can we hear this voice?' 'Listen to God, listen to Jesus, it is real,' he said, 'we can hear it for ourselves.'

A learned friend tells me that the most excellent *Theophilus* to whom Luke addressed his gospel, was a general term for Friend of God, so, friends of God, let us see if we can find out more about hearing this voice of God through today's story of Jesus changing water into wine.

### It's a sign says John, the first sign

You will know that John's Gospel is different from Matthew, Mark & Luke. His style is spiritual rather than historical, and it's a gospel full of theology to meditate on. Being aware that his words may each be significant and have a deeper meaning is often the way to get what John is pointing to. Let's take a look.

On the third day a wedding took place. What else happens on a third day? Well the resurrection of Jesus did, so perhaps this could be a story about resurrection, but it's called a story about a wedding. I wonder if the same event could be both wedding and resurrection. I wonder whose wedding this was anyway. Who was the wedding between? Who was the bride and who the groom?

Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. Mary is called by her name in the other gospels, but not in John. Mary and John were given to each other as mother and son by Jesus on the cross, so perhaps she is called mother because she was in a sense his mother too. Jesus' mother only appears in John's gospel here at the beginning of her son's ministry and then at its end on the cross. In both cases, Mary is defined by her relationship to Jesus, she is the mother of Jesus, who John has already revealed is Son of God. So it's Mary as the Mother of God who is the person we meet in John's gospel.

She was there at the wedding, clearly having had an invitation, but perhaps as of right through her relationship with the Bride and Groom. I wonder what sort of invitation Mary had had. Jesus and his disciples were also invited, but perhaps the relationship with Mary had to come first before the others got to join the party.

Mary was told about the problem. Social disgrace was about to consume the Bride and Groom. Right now in this feast their world was about to collapse at what should be the most joyous party of their lives. Perhaps she decided the time and the place were right for God to intervene through their Son. Jesus complained a bit. Mum, I'm not ready yet. But Mary had heard that one before. In fact, she'd used it herself before with the Angel Gabriel, and look what had happened! The result was in front of her. Now she announces his commission herself. There are others who need to take part in the salvation of this world of bride and groom, and they need to follow his guidance.

Six water jars used by the Jews for ceremonial washing. Six. Enough to have one for every working day of the week. Washing with water to purify the body after the actions of each day and be clean to approach God. Replaced miraculously with wine, the best wine, the best possible wine said the master of the banquet. Water and wine. Wine which would come to represent the blood of Jesus poured out for us. Water and blood which would flow from the body of Jesus on the cross. I wonder who the master of the

banquet might be. I wonder who the bride was and who the groom. We do lots of wondering in Godly Play after exploring a story, and we might add, I wonder where you are in this story.

### **Where are we in this story?**

I have offered a spiritual reading of this story, on which we can meditate. However we read this story, whether we read it spiritually or we read it as history, I think there are two theological principles which can help us experience the voice of God.

### **Firstly, relationships. Relationships come first**

We believe in a Trinitarian God who is the Father who creates, the Son who redeems and the Spirit who sustains, and as we participate in this Trinitarian life we get to know God. The Greek Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas argues that the being of God is to be understood in and through ideas of relationship and community. For him, the being of God can be known only through personal relationships and personal love. Relationships come first.

Before there was a party and a problem, there were relationships. Mary knew the bride and groom and was known by them, they were so close that when there was a very serious problem, it was to their good friend Mary that they went. Mary did not intervene and try to solve a problem for someone she didn't know. She knew them first, so she knew that when they came to her and said we've got a very serious problem, they really had got a very serious problem, she wasn't being manipulated.

In Acts 2, we read this is what the Early Church did. Through meeting together they got to know each other, and then gave to anyone that needed something.

This is exactly what The Manna and Urban Hope do. Building relationships with those who come, getting to know people, building trust and building awareness of what is going on in the other's life. From that relationship and trust, problems can be shared and talked about, and worked on together. Urban Hope and The Manna don't make assumptions, don't steam in and take control. They listen, build relationships and trust, and are then given permission to help.

This principle that relationships come first before giving is one I teach parishes establishing a world church partnership. At first, it's so difficult to hold back and get to know people and their situation. Faced with a need we want to do something for the other, but so much more effective is transformation that comes from working on something together as we have with the church school at St Stephen's, Luanda, as The Manna does in accompanying homeless and disadvantaged people and as Urban Hope does in working with young people. People without power don't need people with power to exercise control through the power they have and get it wrong, they need people with power to set their power aside, be in their situation, and then journey together jointly.

So if relationships come first, then I wonder if we give enough priority to building them within our church community and how we might do that better together.

### **Secondly, dialogue. Dialogue leads to hearing God**

Based on the idea that God can be known only through personal relationships and personal love, Pete Ward suggests 'Communication within the Church becomes an expression of divine life.' 'The Church is a place of divine encounter.' Dialogue leads to hearing God and to sharing in the mission of God.

There was a conversation. Mary presented the problem and Jesus clearly perceived she was asking him to act, but seemed reluctant. Then she acted and he acted, which all seems a bit mysterious, perhaps some of the dialogue was left out at this point or maybe something else was going on to prompt each of them to act in the same way, even though they had started out with different views. I think there's a name for a mysterious something else, which brings us to hear what God wants us to do. We sometimes call this mysterious something the Holy Spirit.

John tells us that glory of Jesus was seen and his disciples believed that he really was the Son of God. The Word of God brings faith to life.

Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth about how we can do this together. “‘No-one can say Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.’ We’ve each been given by God some way of showing what God is like through our lives. We can’t all change water into wine, but when we put together what we can do with what someone else can do, we can do more together than we can do separately. There’s a Kenyan proverb, ‘If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together. Desmond Tutu says, ‘We are made for complementarity. I have gifts that you do not, and you have gifts that I do not. Voilà! We need each other to become fully human.”

As the disciples were transformed by their encounter with God-amongst-them, so we too can be transformed as we discover God amongst us today in our sisters and brothers. For Mary, this meant that the Bride and Groom had wine at their wedding. She took the initiative, we too need to be initiative takers, confident that God is amongst us now, and that through sharing an initiative together, the Holy Spirit will bring about transformation that gives glory to God and builds faith in Jesus.

This wedding feast at Cana was just the start of Jesus’ ministry. John wrote about this being the first sign of Jesus’ glory at the start of the main section of his gospel. Towards the end of his second book, Revelation, John sees ‘The Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband’ and he hears a loud voice saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with humans and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

In this divine wedding feast, relationships come first and dialogue between us leads us to hear God through the Holy Spirit working in us and through us.

### **Prayer**

God of glory,  
you nourish us with your Word  
who is the bread of life:  
fill us with your Holy Spirit  
that through us the light of your glory  
may shine in all the world.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.