

The wedding in Cana of Galilee

17 1 10

Almighty God,
in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature
 by the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives
make known your heavenly glory.

My text may be found in John 2 verse 11: 'Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.'

The twelve days of Christmas have come and gone. Lent is still another month away and Easter Day a further 46 days off from Ash Wednesday. We still have a long way to go before we can enjoy longer days and warm weather but we are in the middle of the season of Epiphany, the middle of Sundays focused on the manifestation of God to Man, the divine revelation of a loving God to his beloved, conscious creation whom he has made in his image and destined for a living relationship with him.

Epiphany, which we celebrated on 3rd January, concentrated on the manifestation of the birth of Jesus Christ to some wise men in the East. Last Sunday, we considered the Baptism of Christ where the Holy Spirit alighted on Jesus in the form of a dove and God spoke words of approbation from heaven, revealing Jesus

to be his Son. This week, the focus shifts to his first miracle at a family wedding in Cana of Galilee where Jesus, Mary and his disciples are guests. It is the miracle of turning water into wine which not only saves a major embarrassment to his family but was done with the prime intention of revealing who he is as my text this morning clearly states: 'Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.'

Jewish weddings are a great source of joy as I now personally know having been invited last December by my friend and former colleague, Lucy Goldwater, to her wedding in a Park Lane hotel to Ari Levitan. Jewish weddings are fundamentally family celebrations. The families gather together because they are delighted that once again two of their number have chosen to live together in love and respect with responsibility under the Law to live a righteous life in which children are born and the doors to their home are open to guests in loving hospitality. It is understandably a happy occasion for the community: especially for the two families united by their children's marriage and for their friends who share their joy. It is a time for eating, drinking and dancing. There is music and laughter conversation and fellowship with the hospitality ultimately being paid for by the father of the bride. Image the potential for embarrassment and shame on the family name if the wine should run out before the celebration is over.

And this is precisely the case at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. Mary had been invited along with her son Jesus and his disciples. It is probably a wedding of a family of which Mary and Jesus were part. When Mary hears that the wine has run out, it is easy to appreciate Mary's concern that their family's name should not be

tarnished. She shares the awful news with her son: 'They have no wine.' Jesus response sounds odd, unhelpful, even a little rude to our ears: 'Woman what concern is that to you'. The Greek word for woman 'γυνή' (gune) is in the vocative case and 'γυνή' is the same word Jesus uses to address his mother from the cross when he entrusts her to the care of the beloved disciple, John. Tone is everything and if you will allow me, then let me suggest to you that it is said with amused respect for his mother (Oh mum!), who is worrying unnecessarily about things. 'What concern is that to you and me' might imply there's no need to worry – things are going to be taken care of – and of course they are!

A further potential problem lies in what Jesus says next: 'My hour has not yet come.' If the hour he is referring to is the crucifixion then that is true. But now is the hour for revealing himself, albeit to a limited circle of witnesses, by his first miracle over nature – by changing water into wine. It is done on a huge scale – between a 130 and 170 gallons – and it is wine of the best quality as the master of ceremonies informs the groom. It is also worth noting that the huge empty water jars were used for a Mikvah, the ritual bath of purification which prepared a Jewish bride for her wedding or cleansed a mother who has recently given birth from the consequent impurities of labour.

The season of Epiphany is focussed on the manifestation of God in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. Today, we have seen that manifestation that revelation in the first miracle of Jesus: turning water to wine. God wants us to see him but as ever the question remains, are our eyes and ears open sufficiently to do so?

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's Dinard

17th January, 2010

H: Sermon 21: Cana Wedding

