



Season of Lay Ministries

Third Sunday of Epiphany

21 January 2024

Hallelujah! Give God glory

Readings

Genesis 14:17-20

Psalms 128

Revelation 19:6-10

John 2: 1-11

Weddings are times of great celebration and the culmination of months, if not years, of hard work. Relatives and friends will frequently come from far and wide to share in the couple's joy.

That's just where we meet Jesus in our Gospel reading - the first of his 'signs' according to St John's account. It's an amazing story for many reasons, among them the fact that Jesus is present in the full spectrum of human life. Our Lord loved a party! He's present with his community, his family, his disciples - and us - who also become guests as we watch to see what will happen.

All seems to be going well - until the wine runs out unexpectedly. Jesus is initially reluctant to intervene and tells his mother: 'My hour has not yet come.' Yet Mary sees a different possibility, that indeed the time is right for Jesus to act. There is something wonderfully natural and reassuring in her faith, the gentle nudge of a mother who knows her son, but who also knows he is truly the Son of God.

Jesus first chose to reveal his glory not in healing a blind man, feeding the five thousand, or in raising his friend Lazarus from the dead, but in changing water into wine at a wedding - at a great celebration, at a party. For us, the story of the wedding at Cana is simply that Jesus chose to be there. It was an occasion worth his time and attention. He was there joining in the celebration, presumably having a good time like all the other guests. And simply being part of people's lives. So may we remember to allow Jesus to be part of every moment of our lives - part of the

good times, as well as part of those times in our lives when, like at that wedding in Cana, our resources run out. Jesus made a difference at that wedding celebration and he can make a difference in all our lives if we are willing to walk with him and trust him.

Of course, this passage also works on many other levels - the special skill the fourth evangelist John uniquely shares the events of Jesus' life:

i) the wine shortfall may indicate the deficiencies of the Law

ii) the water used for Jewish rites of purification is transformed into the new wine of God's kingdom

iii) the enormous quantity of wine Jesus produced points to God's immense and unwavering love and generosity for us

iv) the significance that all this takes place 'on the third day and its association with the resurrection

v) the contrast between those who know and those who do not know what occurred and who Jesus is

vi) the setting for this sign points to Jesus as the Messiah who by providing the wine effectively hosts the banquet and thus continues the revelation of his true identity.

Indeed the significance of wine is also shown in our Genesis reading. A priest of God, Melchizedek, King of Salem, meets Abraham on his return from battle and gives him bread and wine and blesses Abram with power. Some Christian scholars believed this was a precursor to celebrating the Eucharist. In the context of today's Gospel from John, it's interesting to note that the Abram's blessing Abram comes from 'God most High, Maker of heaven and earth' and links the Patriarch Abraham and Jerusalem. (Occasionally the name Jerusalem was abbreviated to Salem.)

The themes of blessings and Jerusalem also appear in Psalm 128 with its portrait of a man blessed not just as an individual, but in the context of his home and of the wider 'prosperity' of God's people and city. Wine and olives are common symbols of God's blessing, which is rooted in the 'fear' or full and proper recognition of God, and active, obedient service.

The Revelation passage gives us a picture of worship in heaven. Here, as in the Gospel reading, those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb are 'blessed' and begin their life in the new age.

The Wedding at Cana reminds us that Jesus meets us and our needs right where we are. We see the joyous, lavish abundance of his love and glory. We also catch a foretaste of the superabundance of what is to come, when we will be part of that ultimate wedding celebration in heaven.

When we feel that we are entangled in the depths of daily living, let's remind ourselves that Jesus is here with us and will always provide a helping hand.

So, let's take up Jesus's mother's command to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you', for the obedience of servants at the wedding feast meant that they were part of the miracle of transforming the things of the earth into something glorious and so, too, can we be if we ask God for help and guidance.

Today, on this third Sunday of Epiphany, may we pray for the grace to be living signs of God's generous love so that all the earth may cry 'Hallelujah! Give God glory, because the wedding of the Lamb has come' (Revelation 19: 6-7) and we are all invited.

Amen.

Gerry Daley, Reader, St Andrew, Coulsdon

A prayer for the Season of Lay Ministries 2024

Written by Marie Williams, Southwark Pastoral Auxiliary (SPA), Holy Saviour, Croydon

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!' Isaiah 6:8 (NRSV)

Lord Jesus,
We give you thanks that
you consider us worthy to serve you
and have called us into ministries of many different kinds.

We pray for all those who are exploring what God's call means in their lives.

Help them to know God's peace and guiding as they listen for God's voice.

And we pray for those already in ministry that as they carry out your work you will help them to demonstrate your love,
your compassion and your truth
so that others may see your beauty and embrace you as Lord and Saviour

We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Suggested hymns

Songs of thankfulness and praise
Love Divine, all loves excelling
Only Jesus
Christ is our light
Christ is the King! O friends rejoice
Lord Jesus Christ you have come to us
Great is thy faithfulness
Come to a wedding, come to a blessing
Through all the changing scenes of life
Rejoice the Lord is king