

JESUS REVEALED IN CANA

(Revelation 19.6-10 and John 2.1-12)

I like a wedding do you?

Last year our neighbour's son got married. We were invited but I had broken my leg so we didn't go. Never mind the feast would come to us. We really felt part of the celebrations. There were crowds on our road all wonderfully dressed. We are on the videos. About 1,000 went to the cricket club. Then the feast came to us. Fabulous food - lasted us for two days.

The wedding in Cana was like that. Everyone was welcome with generous hosts and a great celebration. True, with our neighbours wedding there was no wine but I imagine that they would have been absolutely mortified if the food had run out.

I like weddings they speak of love, of giving, close commitment and joy. Jesus loved weddings - talked about them in parables.

He was often present at a party. He was criticised for the company he kept - often accused by the religious leaders of feasting rather than fasting. He wasn't like his cousin John the Baptist an ascetic but John told his followers that Jesus was greater than him.

At Jesus' Last Supper, - in itself a feast, Jesus said he wouldn't eat of the fruit of the vine until he drank it anew when he came into his kingdom. Our second reading describes this great feast in heaven at the end of time - where Christ is described as the bridegroom and his followers as the bride and all there will enjoy the bounty of God.

This picture doesn't come from nowhere. Throughout the Old Testament God associates himself with weddings.

God is described as the bridegroom and his chosen folk as his bride. In Isaiah 54 v 5 it says 'For your maker is your husband'. In Hosea 2 v 19 - 20 'I will betroth you to me for ever'.

The Bible describes the covenant between God and his people as a marriage with love, giving, commitment and joy,

Then there is wine that is at the heart of the story of the Marriage at Cana. Wine was a sign of the Messianic Age.

In Jeremiah 31 v 12 it says that in that time 'they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord, the grain, the new wine, the oil.

Wine was associated with prosperity, with peace. It requires a stable environment because it takes time to produce.

Wine stands for life, for life blood - for the blood of Jesus. For the Greek philosophers it represented Reason or the Logos.

So let's look at the context of this story.

Before Jesus began his public life he was baptised by John and chosen his companions.

Last Sunday we heard about the call of Nathanael and Jesus' statement that Nathanael would see heaven opened and the angels descending on the Son of Man.

Three days later Jesus and his companions came to this wedding - in Nathanael's home village - maybe a dozen men in all.

The celebrations were well under way and the wine was running low. Maybe these latecomers were the cause of the problem - but it was a social disaster - humiliating.

Jesus' mother was at this wedding. She wasn't just a guest because she knew about the wine and spoke to the servants and to Jesus about the problem. Jesus says that his time hasn't come; his public ministry hasn't begun but he responds to the need.

The commentaries worry about Jesus calling his mother 'woman'. I read this with a bit of wry amusement. I remember in Durham when I was there in a

university dominated by students from the south being gently amused by their reaction to the notices on the public toilets advising Men - Women.

Now for the first time Jesus does something extraordinary when water becomes wine. A place when heaven touches earth.

This is not Jesus doing something dramatic in miracle worker style. It wasn't a miracle to show the whole village that Jesus was a superior magician. No, what he did was a sign for his followers. Apart from them and Mary and the servants nobody else would know what Jesus did.

At the weddings there were 6 big stone containers full of water - the size of water butts.

They were used for the Jewish purification rituals. Jews washed before eating, many going through the ritual washing between each course because it was easy to become ritually unclean at a wedding.

Jewish people knew they weren't as God wanted them to be. They had many rules to keep them in God's way.

For Jesus these jars represented the old order. Jesus came to make all things new. I am come that you might have life and that more abundantly gallons and gallons of it. The bounty God gives is lavish huge.

If we portray God as an authoritative father and not as the great joy giver we need to go and look again.

It was at the marriage at Cana that Jesus' companions were first called his disciples. The word means learners.

After accompanying Jesus they learnt that with Jesus there is always more and better to come. In this miracle they saw his glory and this was just the beginning. John says that the disciples believed on him - that is put their trust in him. And his joy and peace followed.

When people first meet they put on their best face. But later when people get to know each other better then the less good sides appear. Not so with our relationship with Jesus - with him things get better.

In Cathedrals they say that people who visit sometimes come as tourists and leave as pilgrims.

Sometimes people come to church for the music or the company or because their parents came or through habit. Sometimes people get stuck at 3 years old and see God as a glorified Father Christmas - never move on. But then sometimes heaven breaks through and water becomes wine.

Our first encounter with Jesus always changes us but to become his disciples we need to commit to him to trust him. Then he gives us the Holy Spirit who brings us joy and peace and love. He offers himself as our daily bread. When we welcome him as our companion he becomes more than our guide. He is the very light of life within us. Paul says in Galatians, 'I live yet no longer I but Christ lives in me'.

We are invited to God's Banquet and if we throw in our lot with Jesus and remain in his presence life becomes more and more meaningful.

We receive God's love - the best He has to offer. He gives the Holy Spirit with, all that means.

*Jesus thou joy of loving hearts,
Your truth unchanged has ever stood,
True source of life, and light of men.
You rescue those who on you call,
From the best bliss that earth imparts.
To those yet seeking, you are good -
We turn unfilled to You again.
To those who find you, all-in-all.*

*We taste of You the living bread,
Our restless spirits long for You,
And long to feast upon You still,
Whichever way our lot is cast,
We drink from You, the fountain head,
Glad when Your gracious smile we view
Our thirsty souls from You we fill.
Blessed when our faith can hold You fast*

*Jesus for ever with us stay,
Make all our moments calm and bright;
Chase the dark night of sin away,
Spread through the world Your holy light.*