

Epiphany III Year C 2018 (2OT)

We certainly live in interesting time, with the current political impasse regarding a way forward regarding Brexit at the forefront of not just our politicians' minds, but of many within our nation. I think that most people would desire political discourse which is truly constructive in terms of our future. What is depressing to me is the paucity in the will of many within our political class on all sides to seek common ground. This is perhaps a reflection of wider society, where people increasingly identify themselves by one aspect of their character, and then do not venture outside of that self-identification. Locked in, they feel unable to engage with those who do not share this identification. Our Christian Faith has at its heart an openness and willingness to seek the commonality of all people – one might say of all creation – in a journey towards the Divine Love of God. This journey of transformation is taught and revealed to us by Jesus Christ, the one who distills the Love of God into our humanity – the one we are able to constantly journey with. However, fear not. This will not a Brexit sermon – at least other than regarding our common journey! I want us to explore this journeying – the sense of Epiphany constantly at work within our lives.

We have just heard John's beautiful account of the changing of water into wine, and I suppose it is one of the locations in the Gospel narratives which down the centuries have appealed strongly to Christian imagination. However, for those who travel to Cana on their Holy Land tours there is a touch of irony, because we can't be unequivocally sure that the place known today as Cana is the same village we hear of in our Gospel. That said, a priest friend of mine once told me that many pilgrims travel there, numerous couples renew their marriage vows at the Franciscan Wedding Church, and the local wine trade continues to be brisk! However, before becoming entangled in questions of location, it is of much for importance to consider what John describes as the first of the signs which Jesus wrought. John never uses the term 'miracle,' but always, 'sign.' I think this helps us to explore the richness of this account. It means that we are led on a journey of understanding the significance and deeper meaning of the changing of water into wine than is immediately apparent.

John portrays this as a threshold event. It marks the start of the ministry of Jesus, although it is within the context of those he knows. Within a domestic situation, a celebration of love and joy in human relationship, Jesus is represented as transforming what could have been a sorry situation into one of continuing joy. The Wedding at Cana stands at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry and tells of movement and transition from one level of experience, one level of understanding to another for many of the characters who appear in this village nuptial event. There is movement - a shift in perception - which inevitably changes them.

A marriage is being celebrated - and that of itself speaks of change; of passing over into a new reality, a new identity, as man and woman become husband and wife, and two individuals become a single unit. A marriage signals a new creation- matter and spirit, earth

and heaven. At its best marriage speaks of coherence, balance, fullness and completion. We all know that sometimes things go wrong, sometimes terribly. Even in what might be considered the most perfect relationship there will be moments when things can go awry!

So, a marriage. Don't forget that our Scriptures end with the Book of Revelation and the vision of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven adorned as a bride for the wedding feast of the Lamb – in this stupendous vision, the Lamb – the Bridegroom – is Jesus and the Church – that's you and I and all of our brothers and sisters in Christ – the New Jerusalem. But here we are, in Cana, at a very domestic scene.

The disciples who are Jesus experience a shift in their perception of Jesus; an epiphany takes place for them. They see something in him which they haven't seen clearly before. As John puts it, 'they believed in him.'

The same is true for Jesus. He now steps into the public gaze and engages directly with the awkwardness and uncertainties of human life – with its celebrations and aspirations, its helplessness and vulnerabilities in the face of unpredictable and wayward circumstances. He is there, present and living it. There is no drama, nothing over the top - just the simple commands - puzzling to the servants - to fill the water jars with water up to the brim and then to draw some out and take it to the chief steward, what at extravagant modern weddings would be the wedding planner. John conjures up the physical slog for the servants, going to and from the well to the jars, twenty or thirty gallons apiece..... just imagine the huge volume of water! Heavy work, yet the servants do what Jesus asks of them. And for them too there was an epiphany; something given to them – insight and some kind of understanding. Whatever it was, John tells us, 'they knew.' Their epiphany is one of recognizing something in Jesus they hadn't before.

The mother of Jesus was there - she is never named in John's Gospel. She is simply the Mother - the one who brings forth natural life, and who nurtures and sustains it. Here at Cana she does not take control. She simply points out that something is lacking, something is needed, and she suggests what must be done. 'They have no wine,' she says to Jesus. 'Do whatever he tells you,' she says to the servants. John represents Mary as that figure of Wisdom which is in the Jewish tradition both Child and Bride and Mother, and who gives to those who seek her out the water of wisdom to drink. (*Ecclus. 15: 1-3*)ⁱ And the outcome is astonishing. Just when it seems the party is over, something totally unexpected is given. An overflowing, super-abundance - wine, rich beyond compare. 'You have kept the good wine until now' John's Greek seems to indicate that the now really is now. Jesus had said 'My hour has not yet come,' and yet there is this. It is for this moment, this now, that resources are wonderfully provided; here and now – for you and me. The wine is good and in huge measure.

What John seems to want us to understand is that by taking risks in crossing thresholds, venturing ourselves into new possibilities of responding to God, and by acknowledging our poverty, our lack of resources, recognizing that we have no real power to help ourselves, that our transformation can begin to come about. We are all invited to listen for the voice

of true Wisdom, not **my** own voice of self-opinion and self-regard, but the humble wisdom of waiting upon God -allowing the Divine silence to inwardly address and shape us. In seeking to follow Jesus faithfully, we are to do as Mary reminds us: ‘Do whatever he tells you.’

Like the servants at the Wedding Feast, so it is for us: daily life, of seeking to recognize and respond to the God whose epiphanies are not always obvious or unequivocal, but who is both revealed and concealed in the plain facts and natural happenings of everyday life.

Transformation is what all human life looks to - what human life and the life of all creation is engaged upon. The fulness of life is to be found in always seeking to turn towards God; seeking to have the mind of Christ, wanting only what he wants for us and of us. Asking him who made a start with our beginning to perfect his gifts in us, and to find, renew or restore the true self of each one of us. That is how we are to cooperate with the business of our transformation. In this, as Paul reminds us, we are part of the Church, called to build up a community which points others to this wonderful transformation by using whatever gifts we have. In doing so, we are enabled to experience the richness and super-abundance of the rich wine of Divine Love – a Love which never fails. Thus, we are transformed.

This wonderful change to which we are called is captured by Richard Crashaw, the seventeenth-century poet, in his two-line couplet on the Wedding at Cana: *The shamefaced water saw its noble Lord.....and blushed.*



The Wedding Feast at Cana (1563) - Paolo Veronese (1528–88) The Louvre, Paris

Isaiah 62: 1-5

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.
2 The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will give.
3 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
4 You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land Married;
for the Lord delights in you,
and your land shall be married.
5 For as a young man marries a young woman,
so shall your builder marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.

I Corinthians 12: 1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. 3Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.
4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

John 2: 1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' 4And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' 5His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' 6Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. 8He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. 9When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' 11Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

ⁱ Whoever fears the Lord will do this, and whoever holds to the law will obtain wisdom. She will come to meet him like a mother, and like a young bride she will welcome him. She will feed him with the bread of learning and give him the water of wisdom to drink.