

Sermon on Third Sunday of Epiphany 2018 – Canon David Hodgson, All Saints Church Wokingham

Readings: Genesis 14: 17 – 20; John 2: 1 – 11

What about the story of Jesus at the wedding in Cana? It appears in John's gospel only. And of course, as we reflect on it we can see there are many levels of symbolism.

One commentator on this gospel puts it like this:

"The first impression given by the narrative is that of a simple miracle-story. But the mysterious words about the 'hour' of Jesus, the lavish quantity of wine, the final remark of the gospel author – "Jesus showed his glory by doing this sign" - and indeed the whole gist of the story make it clear that there is a deeper meaning behind the words of the narrative."

We need not approach St John's Gospel as if it is a literal and historical narrative. The author of this gospel has not written this gospel to amuse or amaze us. He has a different purpose. And he tells us what that purpose is in Chapter 20:

"...these [signs] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name".

St John's Gospel was written to show its readers that Jesus is the one to put your trust in for life. The message of this gospel is about Jesus. He is the one who not only changes water into wine but also can change the character of our lives. With Jesus there is available a completely new relationship with God and with people too. This is a relationship based on grace – based on the undeserved blessing and favour which God has for us. In Christ and in the community of Christ we can live in total acceptance; forgiven by God. And so in a Christian community we have the freedom to accept one another and to forgive one another because each one of us is accepted and forgiven by God.

The changing of the water into wine symbolises how Jesus has changed human life for good. Life has a new basis, a new ground, a new matrix for us to grow from. We are no longer alone in and threatened by the world. Instead we are deeply grounded in the unquenchable love which is the heartbeat and the destiny of life.

It's interesting that elsewhere in this gospel Jesus speaks of himself as the true vine and his followers as the branches of the vine. There is one process in this world by which water is turned into wine and that is by the vines which produce grapes which are then transformed by human industry and skill into wine.

In a way the wine in this story symbolises God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit. The water might symbolise our human energies and gifts. Because of Jesus we have been given the Holy Spirit which transforms our gifts and energies towards bringing the enjoyable wine of the peace and the joy and the love of God into our lives, our families and our communities.

The event when we as Christians come together to celebrate and to give thanks for Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit and to pray for the coming of God's kingdom is in the Holy Eucharist where we offer our energies and gifts to God and share in the body of Christ and receive the Holy Spirit to renew us. I mention the Eucharist today because our other Bible reading today alludes, in a Christian reading of the Hebrew Scriptures, to the Eucharist. In that story from the Book of Genesis, Melchizedek you recall brought bread and wine to Abraham. And then this story of the changing of the water into wine is also a reference to the Last Supper and to the Eucharist where we continue to share in the body and blood of Christ. Wine is a very powerful

symbol of salvation and joy. And so the Eucharist is a feast and the feast – often a wedding feast - is symbolic all through the Bible of the fulfilment of God's purposes in his community of peace and of freedom from sin. In the Eucharist we have a symbolic foretaste of that community of joy and peace. In the church we must seek always to let our life as a community be filled and led by the Holy Spirit so that the character of God's community of peace and joy is revealed. We do not always succeed being frail and fearful as we are; and so, we need to rely on God ever more deeply to be the kind of community we could be - changed by the miracle of Jesus - as the water was changed into wine. This Eucharist when the wine is poured and shared becomes for us God's feast for his people; a feast of forgiveness and grace, given when Christ died for us.

I have never been to a feast or a party and been offered only water – especially not a wedding. God invites us to a new life where the water of our all – too - human expectations will be changed into the wine of his marvellous promise of peace and love. That is God's invitation to us. And that promise is for our own lives and also for the life of this community. As we go forward and as we journey in faith as a church towards the vision and the goals we believe God has inspired us to aim for; most importantly let us ask earnestly and confidently for the fine wine of the Holy Spirit - to infuse us as a community more and more with the wine of peace, healing, acceptance and joy. As Jesus made a difference at the wedding in Cana so he will make a difference in this community in our life together and in each of our lives.

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