

10.00am Healing Eucharist – 17th January 2010
Epiphany 2 – Christian Unity – Year C

Isaiah 62: 1-5/1 Corinthians 12: 1-11/John 2: 1-11

In looking at today's gospel reading, anyone fortunate enough to have attended a wedding in a small, rural community has an advantage. At such occasions, sometimes paralleled in ethnic urban environments, one finds that the power of the actual wedding is underscored by the exuberant celebration that follows. After the commitment of vows, day-long events continue the celebrations, which can involve everyone in the community. They are well supplied with beverages, including those of the adult-only variety, lots of food, dancing, and other kinds of merry-making for all ages. An extended family doing what they do best.

And such weddings reflect those in Biblical times, including the one at Cana of Galilee. A whole village, a day-long celebration, lots of food and dancing, and storytelling and reminiscing, and much wine to drink. But what began as an ordinary wedding at Cana, resulted in anything but an ordinary action. We heard today, an account of Jesus' earliest recorded miracle. Creative energy surges through the story, like the energy of new hope that greets the beginning of each new year, and, as so often in the Bible, it refers us back to the Creation and the Creator.

As John so eloquently says in the prologue to his gospel:

All things came into being through him, and without him no one thing came into being.

Every sign that John recounts is explained by this one statement. John calls the miracles – signs - arrows pointing us towards God, that makes this perfect for Epiphany, because it manifests, or shows, what God is to us.

Jesus performed miracles to point out that God the Father was at work in the life and activity of all of us.

Like those signs on the road that say, **Men at work**, the miracles point us to God at work. The meaning of the miracles was always more important than the method by which they were performed, and John used the story of the wedding at Cana to reveal something about the character and nature of God that was much deeper and broader than any simple miracle could ever convey. We are forced to reflect on the mysteries of God, and to re-examine our own lives, digging deep to discover what God wants for us and from us.

In the midst of an ordinary celebration, Jesus did something so remarkable that we are forced to think about who we are and who God is. We can't miss the obvious fact that this is a miracle about abundance and extravagance.

We hear about an enormous amount of wine. Six jars, with twenty to thirty gallons per jar, is by any standard extravagant. That translates to between 700 and a 1000 modern 700ml bottles of wine. And it was good wine.

A clear example of the grace that God bestows on us, beyond anything we should ever expect, or could ever deserve. It's a message that God wants us to celebrate life.

To enjoy the company of one another, as companions engaged in this great adventure called life. So this is also obviously a miracle of both transformation and new possibilities. In Cana, Jesus made it possible for the wine of celebration to continue flowing, which reminds us of a central symbol of our faith. Jesus provides for us the wine of a whole new creation, that continues to sustain us. Recounting the story of Jesus changing water into wine was John's way of showing that He had come to do nothing less than to transform the common into the holy.

In Christ we learn about the power of God to:

- transform the incomplete, into the whole.
- transform the weaker, into the stronger.
- transform the ordinary, into the precious.
- transform the despised, into the beloved.
- transform the tasteless, into that which gives joy to the heart.
- transform what we are, into what we can become.

But how well this transformation can take place depends on our connectedness with God. And that connectedness depends on our connectedness with Jesus, in whom we see the human face of God. The unity between God and human kind has often been explained in scripture through examples of marriage. For example, in today's Old Testament lesson, we heard the prophet Isaiah use the wedding metaphor to describe God's redemption of Israel.

The prophet refers to a time when the Jewish nation would return to Jerusalem after the exile, and the eventual creation of a new Jerusalem, from the one that had been destroyed. Isaiah encouraged the people with stirring words, again of trans-formation:

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.

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.

In the New Testament, wedding metaphors are used as examples of the relationship of God with the people of God. We are encouraged to better understand our relationship with the unseen God, by examining the nature of love between two people in an ideal marriage. In this way, we can better know the love that God intends for a relationship with us, his children. In the extravagance of wine at Cana, we are bidden to examine the best kind of love in marriage and see the giving away of self, as something that can lead to new possibilities. That can produce in each of us a genuine transformation from the tendency toward human selfishness, into gracious, loving Christ-like-ness.

Today's gospel story about a miracle at a wedding celebration can help lead us all to a renewed life in Christ. We can learn how to better share the unlimited gifts that God offers us. We can learn how to celebrate the joys of human community and the union that we can have with God. One that will sustain us throughout our journey of faith. So may it be our prayer today, that Christ will more closely unite, not only with the whole church, but specifically with each congregation and each individual. In such a prayer we seek an unbreakable connection of mutual love. Love that will not only show us clearly what God is like, but will also lead us to seek in our hearts and souls, to enter into the new and abundant life of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Jesus enjoyed life, and he also wanted others to enjoy it to the fullest. He is not a gloomy bride groom, but a joyful friend.

He tells us:

This is who I am, follow me.

There is goodness in life, and in the meaningful occasions of our lives. We all have emerged from a season of companionship with family and friends, a season of feasting and music. As we enter into this new year, let's remember that the Lord of life contributed to the joy of a wedding feast, blessing it with his presence and blessing it with his gift of abundance.

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.

I am about to do a new thing.

Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

May everything that is new, and good, and whole, be revealed to us in this season of Epiphany, as a gift of the Spirit, so that our joy may be complete.

Let me finish with a story that has been doing the rounds for many, many years.

The customs officer was examining the luggage of a priest, who had just returned from the Holy Land.

What's in this bottle?

Holy water, answered the priest.

The customs officer took the stopper out and sniffed the contents, then said:

It smells more like whisky to me.

Well praise the Lord, the priest exclaimed, **another miracle.**

Amen.