

Worship at Home, Sunday 16 January, 2022

Welcome to our Worship at Home for Sunday the sixteenth of January.

Our invitation to worship 'I will praise the Lord all my life. I will sing praise to my God as long as I live' (Psalm 146: 2).

And we pray together. **Let us pray.**

Yes, Lord, You are with us all our days. You will still be with us at the end. We have reason to praise you all our life long. We are held in your eternal embrace. So we praise you now, our God, and will continue to do so And, above all, praise be to you for our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

Our **Reading** this time is John's Gospel, chapter 2:

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.'

'Woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.'

His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from eighty to a hundred and twenty litres.

Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water'; so they filled them to the brim.

Then he told them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.'

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.'

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

That wedding would have been a happy, jolly, joyful occasion.

So we sing our **hymn** 'Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising' in 'Singing the Faith, number 76.

Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising,
give me joy in my heart, I pray;
give me joy in my heart, keep me praising,
keep me praising till the end of day.

*Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King of kings!
Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King!*

Give me love in my heart, keep me serving ...

Reflection

We could spend a lot of time thinking how it could possibly be that Jesus turned the water into wine, and we would all have different ideas. But that would be to miss the point. Remember that John in his gospel, as well as writing a largely historical narrative, was also writing a spiritual, deeper commentary on the importance of Jesus's life. So let's move on to that...

First, note how Jesus's relationship with his mother has changed. He is now his own man. He has left home, and has set off on his career as a wandering preacher. He is no longer accountable to his mother, but to God, his heavenly Father. Incidentally, his words to his mother in the traditional

translation 'Woman, what have you to do with me?' are not really rude or dismissive. It's the translation that makes them sound like it. In contemporary English, it would be more like 'Mother dear, just let me get on with it in my own time'.

Secondly, this story reminds us what an ordinary, fun-loving young man Jesus was. He went to an ordinary wedding in a small town, and was obviously enjoying himself and entering into the spirit of the occasion. He was not over-religious and solemn. This story reminds us of his full humanity. In coming to earth 'He emptied himself of all but love.' It reminds us that we do not need to be over-religious or solemn either.

But, thirdly, the prime message is about the 'six stone jars.' They had contained water for the Jewish rites of purification.' But they were getting empty. They were beginning to cease to fulfil their purpose. For John, and for us, they symbolise something. They represent formal religion, and not simply the Jewish religion as it was then. But they represent any religion that is about going through the correct motions, performing the correct rituals, doing the respectable thing. These things are not wrong in themselves. Indeed the Jewish regulations of hygiene were necessary for public health. But religion, any religion, even the Christian religion, is more than that: more than a building block to make human society stable. John shows that it can be more than that. Jesus changes the water of formal religion into the wine of a relationship with him. It's a lifelong process. May that be true for each one of us. .

In conclusion, it is not fashionable nowadays, to quote the Victorian poet Robert Browning, but I cannot refrain from quoting this from his poem 'Rabbi Ben Ezra': 'Grow old along with me! / The best is yet to be, / the last of life / for which the first was made.' With Jesus in our lives, we know the enduring joy that that brings. There is more and better to come. And for that we praise God. Amen.

We come to our **prayers of Intercession**.
Let us pray.

We thank you, Lord, for all the blessings that come to us through our religion: the sense of community, a structure to our lives, opportunities to serve our fellow men and women, near and far away. And we thank you above all for the blessing that is ours of knowing Jesus as our constant companion day by day. Amid all the busyness of church life, do not let us ever forget that, the greatest blessing of all, the companionship of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

And, Lord, we turn our eyes to the outside world, first to our immediate personal concerns... We think of friends we know who need our prayers because of the difficulties they are facing. We name them now in the silence... [pause]... Bless them according to their needs, May they know your comfort and your peace.

Lord, as we approach the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we thank you for the growing unity between the churches. Bless the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and prosper them in their work. And we pray for our local churches in Barnstaple. Help them to grow in mutual respect and cooperation, we pray.

We pray, Lord, for our government. As they face the difficult balancing task of easing the lockdown, keeping the economy going and controlling COVID, give wisdom and determination, we pray.

Lord, we also have worldwide concerns, for places where there is conflict or the threat of conflict. Raise up peace builders in those places we pray.

Lord, we thank you that we can bring all our concerns to you in prayer. Accept these prayers, spoken and unspoken and answer them according to your perfect will, we pray, in Jesus' name **Amen**.

The blessing of God almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with us all. **Amen**. .

Revd Tony Coates