

Sunday Morning Worship
Readings, Reflection & Prayers for 19th January



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.
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.
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
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^{le} marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.

This is the word of the Lord

1 Corinthians 12.1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore 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. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to 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. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

This is the word of the Lord.

John 2.1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it.

When 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 and 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.' Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Reflection by Lindsey Coulthard

On my trip to Paris last November Ian and I visited the Louvre Museum and booked a guided tour in order to get the most out of our time there. We approached the end and climax of our tour in a room with hordes of people clambering for a look at the infamous Mona Lisa but.....in my humble opinion – the painting on the wall opposite was by far the most breathtaking artwork in the room. I could have stayed for hours just taking it all in but for the crowds....

This astonishing work by Italian artist Paulo Veronese measures six metres high and ten metres wide and occupies an entire wall. It's titled 'The Wedding at Cana' and it depicts an extraordinary wedding banquet with no less than 132 exquisite characters dressed in typical 16th century Venetian style. It was commissioned by the monks of the San Giorgio Maggiore Monastery in 1562 for the wall of their refectory and had a bit of a chequered time on leaving there until it finally came to rest at the Louvre.

Standing in front of this captivating work though, it was not easy to identify who the bride and groom were because in this marriage scene – Christ, his mother and his disciples are at the centre of this piece relegating the bride and groom to the bottom left of the painting. The predominant figure is Christ whose gaze is fixed upon the viewer. All the other characters are looking elsewhere - apart from the bride, but we'll return to her later.....

In this season of Epiphany we are fortunate to experience three 'epiphanies' or manifestations; first the visit of the magi where Jesus was recognised as the Son of God, last week the baptism of Jesus where Jesus is affirmed as the Son of God ('This is my Son') and today the wedding feast at Cana where Jesus himself manifests the glory of God by performing his first sign. All are epiphanies of the glory of God in Jesus. A recent article in the Church Times by retired priest and author Revd. Adrian Leek reflects on these three manifestations recognising that the threefold character of this festival has its origins in the 13th century and is attributed to the liturgist William Durrand who referred to the triple

manifestation of Christ's glory as 'epiphania' (manifestation), 'theophania' (God manifestation) and 'bethphania' (house manifestation).

So what are we to make of this for ourselves?

Well, I'd like to share something by Jeffrey John retired Archbishop of Wales. In one of his books he reflects on a pilgrimage that he led to the Holy Land where they visited the church at Cana that is (sic- wrongly) identified as the place at which the sign occurred. And as is the custom of countless pilgrims who make the journey there – many couples join hands around the altar and renew their wedding vows. Many in his party did this too and he was happy to repeat the marriage blessing over these couples afterwards which he says was deeply moving but..... he hadn't realised just how painful that would be for a considerable number of his party who were unable to join in: those who were bereaved, those who had never had a partner, those who were lonely in their singleness and those whose partnerships are not officially sanctioned by the Church.

He reflects that he perhaps shouldn't have done what he did in that Church at Cana 'not only because it was too painful for so many people, but because the miracle or 'sign' at Cana has almost nothing to do with marriage in the normal sense anyway.' (He was horrified to discover how many of the group were in tears in the shadows at the back, while the married people symbolically stood in the light around the altar celebrating their joy.)

The wedding is a symbol in the prophetic tradition for the time of fulfilment of God's purpose for his people so it's no accident that many stories in the Gospels are about weddings; for example, the story of the wedding guest who turns up but is thrown out for not wearing the proper clothes and the story of the guests who choose the highest and lowest places at the wedding feast. Elsewhere, in the climax to the book of Revelation, heaven itself is described as the wedding feast of the lamb, the ultimate union of Christ and his Church. In all these cases the wedding is a parable or symbol of the kingdom of God.

The story of the wedding at Cana , though it has the form of a miracle story, and though Jesus himself, at least at the level of logic, is not the bridegroom, has to be understood within the same symbolic tradition. Perhaps that's what Veronese is alluding to in his glorious portrayal of the wedding at Cana. Of all the characters in that piece of work - Jesus is the central figure – not the bride and groom - Jesus is the one that the eye is drawn to. Our Gospel passage today began with the words 'On the third day (there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee)'. Where else do we hear those words in scripture? Where else will we speak those words in our liturgy this morning? On the third day.....

The use of the stone water jars indicates the inadequacy of the Jewish rites of purification. The 'good wine kept until now' signifies that the consummation of God's plan is only now being disclosed. In addition, and in keeping with rabbinic numerology, the number six is often associated with imperfection or incompleteness hence the six stone water jars set the stage for Jesus' miraculous transformation, symbolizing the transition from the old covenant to the new.

Our reading from Isaiah reminds us of God's original covenant with his people; the Israelites have returned from exile bowed down and exhausted but God promises to vindicate them. They are going to be his beautiful crown, 'a royal diadem'. They are to be renamed, 'My Delight is in Her' and the land will be called 'Married'. God is renewing that covenant relationship with his people, telling them again that they are loved forever.

'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.'

And Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians encourages the use of spiritual gifts to build one another up; being witnesses of Christ in the world. We too can be encouraged by these words to use our spiritual gifts because

the God who calls us, loves us completely, is wedded to us and will never let us go.

So to return to Jeffery John and his pilgrimage, he later reflects that it would have made more sense to celebrate the Eucharist at that church in Cana; 'since that would have been far truer to what Cana is really about'.

The wedding at Cana is about the marriage between God and his people, Christ and the Church. All are invited to the Wedding Supper of the Lamb and none are excluded.

And so back to the bride in Veronese's magnificent piece of work. Remember I said she was the only other person apart from Christ that has her gaze on the viewer. Perhaps that's because you (we) are the bride. Whatever our marital status, no one need stand at the back in the shadows and weep because all are invited to this feast. All are invited to drink this 'new wine' – the very best saved till last, for you. And none are excluded.

Prayers

To the bidding: Generous and loving God

Please reply: **Hear our prayer**

Generous and loving God

Hear our prayer

Dear Lord, we pray for your church around the world. For the leaders and all the volunteers who keep things running. We are grateful for the love you show us, the promises you made us and the relationship we have with you. We pray that we can help to grow your kingdom here on earth, so more people will know your love.

Generous and loving God

Hear our prayer

Dear lord, we thank you for the gift of creation. The world we live in and we ask you to help us to become better stewards of this wonderful gift. We bring before you all the places and situations where there is hate, fear, violence and struggles. We remember the people, your children, who are suffering and effected by this. Thinking especially of where there are places surrounded by war and conflict, help there to be peace, and those places where there is natural disasters. We thank you for all those who bring care and aid and who strive for peace.

Generous and loving God

Hear our prayer

Dear lord, we thank you for all those in our local community who share their gifts. For all who help to grow your kingdom in every way, big or small. We thank you for the gifts you have blessed us with and ask for guidance on how we can use them to share with others. Help us as neighbours to extend hands of friendship and acts of kindness to one another. Teach us to see the beauty in diversity and the shared humanity

that binds us. May our community reflect Your light and love to the world.

Generous and loving God

Hear our prayer

Dear lord, we pray for all those suffering in mind, body and spirit, and all who love and care for them. For everyone feeling lost or unsure we pray they know your love and compassion. Help us to remember your love even on our darkest of days. We think especially of all those from our own community and we pray especially for; Rosie Goddard, Margaret Pridmore, Christine Dunne, Bill Jones, Leon and Valda Bailey, Ken and Joyce Pringle, Ann Hunt, Anuwat Wanggane, Alan Coe, Jack Tubby, Gloria, Roger Jones, Patricia Ash, Ryan Day, Brenda Hulland, David New, Sue Wright, Meriel Orton and Adrina and Alan Price.

Generous and loving God

Hear our prayer

Dear lord, We remember all those who have passed into your kingdom of heaven. We thank you for the memories we can treasure and pray they are all now at peace with you. You sent your only son to give us life eternal and we are forever grateful. We remember the recently departed Reginald Faulkner, June Hume and Gaynor 'Gill' Crutchley and we pray for all who mourn.

We remember with love and gratitude those whose anniversary falls at this time:

Di Richards, Ann Quiney, Ken Quiney, Eileen Sutton, Mary Pink, Dillon Emmanuel, Barbara Bristow and Richard Boulter.

And those we love but see no longer. Grant us with them, a share in your eternal kingdom.

May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

Generous and loving God

Hear our prayer

Merciful Father,

accept these prayers

for the sake of your Son,

our saviour Jesus Christ

Amen.