

2nd Sunday of Epiphany – Wedding at Cana: Revealing Jesus' glory

Some of you may be familiar with the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* in which 'Herod's Song' portrays Herod's interrogation of Jesus after his arrest (Luke 23). Herod has been wanting to meet Jesus because he's heard about this miracle-working, itinerant teacher, wanting him to perform signs in front of him. The song recounts miracles from the gospel accounts with lines such as:

*Prove to me that you're no fool
Walk across my swimming pool*

or

*Feed my household with this bread
You can do it on your head*

and

*Prove to me that you're divine
Turn my water into wine*

No prizes for guessing that the last of these refers to events in today's Gospel reading!

The opening of John's Gospel, commonly referred to as the prologue (John 1:1-18), introduces subjects or themes which are expanded on through the rest of the Gospel, one of which is the glory of God seen in Jesus.

Then a week of events ending with the Wedding at Cana (John 1:19-2:11). John goes on to describe Jesus itinerant ministry for three years (John 2:12-11:end); then the week of events leading up to the crucifixion and resurrection (John 12:1- 20:10); and finally the post-resurrection appearances (20:11-21:25).

The events of the first and last weeks have a number of parallels, the last of which is the parallel between the Wedding at Cana and the resurrection.

Coincidentally, I spoke on this passage last year during Epiphany! Then, I set the context of wedding celebrations in an honour-based culture in 1st Century Israel; Jesus attending because of a likely connection (possibly via Nathaniel); the wine running out (shameful in an honour-based culture) and Jesus turning water into wine to deal with the situation..... unlike certain 'parties' or 'events' at a certain property in Downing Street, the lack of wine couldn't be solved by a junior civil servant popping out to the nearest supermarket with a suitcase to fill up with bottles of wine!

Today, I want us to focus on the statement made at the end of our reading:

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

But first a quick look at this parallel I suggested between this event and Jesus death and resurrection – noting that Jesus 'hour' speaks of his death ('my hour has not yet come' cf 'Father, the hour has come', John 17:1).

Wine had been flowing at the wedding and it had run out..... Now, assuming this wasn't because it was bad wine and people had been tipping it into the pot plants, it was good wine! The steward implies this when he says to the bridegroom, 'Everyone serves the good wine first.....' Then Jesus turns water into wine which is better.

The Law, the Old Covenant given to Israel by God was good, like the good wine the wedding guests had been drinking..... but (as the writer to the Hebrews says) it was a shadow or less than what was to come. The resurrection of Jesus brings in the New Covenant between God and humankind and it is better than what was available previously, like the better wine Jesus produced turning the water in the stone jars into wine. Not only was it better, but it was also abundant, generous in quantity! This is part of what it means when we are told this

was a 'sign' – a sign pointing to something better and more generous than what people had enjoyed up to this point.

But what about this sign 'revealing Jesus' glory'? What is meant by 'glory'? Did the miracle result in a halo appearing above Jesus' head as we see in icons and stained-glass windows? Or a glow round him like the child on the ReadyBrek advert (maybe some are showing their age if they remember that!).

In John's writing, he uses Greek words in a way which reflects the Hebrew of the Jewish scriptures – something we must bear in mind as we explore the text. So, when John writes *doxa* (Gk as in *doxology*) he is reflecting the Hebrew word *kabod*. At its root, *kabod* means 'to be heavy or weighty' and has the broader meanings of 'importance', 'wealth', 'reputation', 'visible splendour'. Therefore, when John says that Jesus 'revealed his glory.....his *doxa*', he is saying, through this sign of turning water into wine, this sign which points to the New Covenant in place of the Old, Jesus revealed his 'reputation', his 'visible splendour'.

In the Old Testament, people had only seen a glimpse of God's glory. For example, Moses asked God to show him His glory (Ex 33-34) but Moses only heard words.....

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed,
"The LORD, the LORD,
a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger,
and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,
keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation,
forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,
yet by no means clearing the guilty,
but visiting the iniquity of the parents
upon the children
and the children's children,
to the third and the fourth generation."
And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped.

Isaiah saw God's glory (Is 6 LXX).....

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and raised up, and the house was full of his glory

But Isaiah also spoke of glory in the Suffering Servant (Is 52 LXX).....

See, my servant shall understand
and he shall be exalted and glorified exceedingly.
so shall your appearance be without glory from humans
and your glory be absent from humans

The glimpses of God's glory seen by Moses, Isaiah, and others, describing his character, is echoed throughout John's Gospel, starting in the prologue when we are told the Word became flesh..... As the words Moses heard described the character of God..... the character of God is revealed in human form in Jesus, and this is the glory that was revealed, and which was first revealed in this first sign and then in the other signs in John's Gospel – ultimately in his death and resurrection.

So, as we think about the physical miracle of water being turned into wine, at the end of this first week of Jesus' ministry, to provide better wine than had been available earlier in the wedding party, let's consider how this sign points to the end of the last week of his ministry and Jesus' death and resurrection providing a better covenant, a better way of there being a relationship between God and humankind than had been available before. Let's look up and see the honour, the splendour.....the glory!

Amen