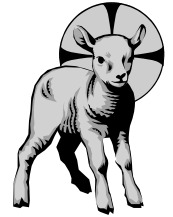




Enjoying God: Life in All its Fullness

(passages from John's Gospel)

Summer 2017



John 2:1-11 Abundance

(sermons: May 14)

Introduction

Chapter 1 of John's Gospel begins with the intriguing prologue, introducing Jesus as the Word who became a human being; then, after Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, he chose his first followers.

Chapters 2 to 4 show how Jesus brings new beginnings: the water of the old purification rituals is replaced by the new wine of the kingdom (2:1-11); Jesus shows that he is the new 'temple', the focus of God's presence amongst his people (2:12-25); we need a new birth to enter the new kingdom (3:1-22); and the new fountain of the living water of the Spirit replaces Jacob's ancient well, enabling renewed worship in spirit and in truth (4:1-42).

The account of the wedding at Cana may be suitable for reading with people taking different parts, or meditating on the passage from different viewpoints (disciples, Mary, servants, guest, master of feast...).

John 2:1-11 Jesus at the Wedding in Cana

- v.1 on the third day – after Jesus met Philip and Nathanael (John 1:43-51), completing the first week of Jesus' public ministry
- v.1 weddings were longer, more elaborate ceremonies in Jesus' time (even without photographers!). After fetching the bride from her home, the celebrations at the bridegroom's family home could last for a week. If there was not enough food or wine for the guests, the bridegroom's family would be humiliated; it would suggest that they undervalued the bride and might even break up the marriage.
- v.1 Cana – in the region of Galilee, 20 miles S.W of Lake Galilee towards the Mediterranean coast, and about 10 miles N.E. of Nazareth.
- v.1 Jesus' mother – John never refers to her by name (see John 19:26-27, when Jesus entrusted her to John's care). Joseph had probably died since the family visit to Jerusalem when Jesus was 12.
- v.4 dear woman – quite a distant greeting (like 'Madam'?). On several occasions Jesus distanced himself from his family when they seemed to be claiming priority in his public ministry.
- v.4 my time has not yet come – Jesus had a keen sense of 'time' or 'opportunity' see John 12:23, 13:31
- v.6 ceremonial washing – religious ritual as well as hygiene; servants would pour the water over the guests' hands. See Mark 7:1-4, where Jesus saw this elaborate ritual as a human emphasis on external, as opposed to internal, purity.
- v.8 master of the banquet – head waiter, or toast-master, hired by the bridegroom (who paid the wedding bills) or perhaps an honoured guest who performed the role (like the best man)
- v.10 you have saved the best till now – was the master of the banquet saying more truly than he realized? i.e. that God had kept the best part of his revelation of himself until now.
- v.11 miraculous signs – actions of Jesus that show his power and have a symbolic meaning
- v.11 revealed his glory – showed (part of) who he really was (as in John 1:14)
- v.11 put their faith in him – literally 'believed into him' (not just 'believed that....')

1. Do we have any problems accepting this miracle, or do we understand why some people find it hard to accept what is described here? (*a physical miracle without any possible 'psychological explanation', hardly a matter of life & death – but note the potential seriousness of the situation for the family*)
What do we say to people who find it hard to accept this miracle (and others)?
2. Jesus seemed reluctant to act at first (v.4) but then responded with his first miracle. Was he wondering whether it would be showing favouritism to use God's power to sort out a family friend's problem? Did seeing the potential symbolism of the water containers make him change his mind? Or can we catch a glimpse here of how Jesus' humanity was complemented by his total openness and obedience to God the Father, here prompting him to respond to Mary's request?
3. John describes this miracle as '*the first of his miraculous signs*'.
As a '*sign*' what does this miracle point to: about who Jesus was and what he came to do?
What is the *significance* of the water coming from water jars used for ceremonial washing?
4. The servants knew where the water came from (v.9) so what did they feel when they were told to take it to the master of ceremonies? Did they realize what had happened? Why did only the disciples seem to have responded by putting their faith in Jesus (v.11)?
Is it still true that some people see God at work in events and people's lives where others see nothing?
5. Jesus and his disciples were welcome guests at the wedding celebration. At times he was criticized for his willingness to join in a party (*see Matthew 11:18-19*). How can we enjoy life, celebrate God's goodness and reject a false asceticism (*see 1 Timothy 4:1-5*), whilst avoiding greed or compromising Christian moral standards? (*see also John 17:14-18*)
6. Are our Christian faith, and our lives, like water or like wine? Do we enjoy the abundance of all that God offers us? What can we do, individually, as a group, and as a church, to allow Jesus to transform our watered-down faith into sparkling wine?
7. Share ways we might serve the communities in which we live and work in a way that '*turns water into wine*' and brings new life: new life in relationships, new life in the environment where we live, opportunities for people to see God at work around them, and new spiritual life in a personal way.
8. Jesus brought new life and a new message (*see Introduction on previous page*).
Do we give the impression that our faith is new and always being renewed – or is there something old, or stale, or second-hand in how we communicate our faith?
How can we help each other to avoid getting in the way of what God wants to do in and through us, as individuals, as a group, and as a church – and instead be open to the transformation and abundance of life that he offers?