

Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 16th January 2022
2nd Sunday of Epiphany

Collect

Eternal Lord,
our beginning and our end:
bring us with the whole creation
to your glory, hidden through past ages
and made known
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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.

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.

Sermon

The season of Epiphany is all about signs. First the magi follow the star to the birthplace of Jesus. They discover the Son of God in the form of a vulnerable infant. In their gifts, they show us something of what will happen in Jesus's life – gold to signify his Kingship, albeit a kingship unlike any we might traditionally recognise; frankincense as a sign of his divinity and connection with God; and myrrh to anticipate his untimely death. And they also show us that God is for everyone – Jew and gentile alike, and by extension, everyone and anyone else.

Last Sunday we celebrated the Baptism of Christ – the ultimate sign that Jesus is God's son. And also showing us that in his very self Jesus holds together both humanity and divinity, since he chooses to be baptised just like everyone else. This week we see a different sign, which takes place at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, where Jesus turns water into wine, and it's worth pausing for just a moment on what we are being shown here.

The first part of John's gospel is often referred to as the book of signs. Whereas the other gospels speak of miracles, John was especially interested in pointing towards what those miracles actually show. Their depth of meaning. So, what do we find?

I love the way that John sets the scene. Although this is not an event mentioned in any of the other gospels, there is a sense in which John wants us not only to believe that it happened, but perhaps more importantly to step into the story. And it's such an easy one to step into. It's the third day; we are in Cana of Galilee; we are at a wedding; and Jesus is there with his mother and disciples. It's a scene that is easy to picture.

John has already introduced us to the first disciples – at the end of chapter 1 – yet this is Mary's first appearance. This is the first thing that we find out about Mary in John's gospel. And we get a sense of her significance in Jesus's life. When the wine runs out, she doesn't hesitate. She immediately goes up to Jesus and tells him that there is no wine. She gives no sense of what she expects him to do, but clearly she anticipates that he'll do something.

Jesus's response might make us take a step back. Far from expressing obedience to his mother, he appears to stamp her down. He asks what concern it is to them that the wine has run out, and then explains that his hour has not yet come. Mary seems almost entirely ambivalent, simply assuming that contrary to what he has said, Jesus will indeed act, and she prepares people to do as he says.

What is going on here? What might we learn from this exchange? I love the sense this gives us of a close relationship between Jesus and his mother, of her significance in his life. Not only is he willing to question her assumption, but he also trusts her judgement. And I think this also shows us something about Jesus's vocation. That he is working it out, and that he is prepared for other people to be a part of his exploration and discoveries.

As the story unfolds, we are once again given sufficient detail to really picture all that is taking place, as the servants fill six enormous stone jars to the brim with water, and then take it to the steward for him to taste. We can decide for ourselves the expression on the steward's face as he tastes good wine, instead of water. And so the party continues.

Here there is something fascinating, too. Who is it who knows what has happened? Who has noticed?

The servants know because they have been part of it. Jesus's mother knows, as do his disciples, and we hear that the disciples believe in him as a result. But what about the others? The steward assumes that it is the bridegroom who produced the wine – and praises him for it. We hear nothing about the bridegroom's response, but perhaps he is only too happy to receive unwarranted accolades. For almost everyone else, the party continues, unabated.

And I wonder whether that might lead us all to ask ourselves where it is that we see the signs of God's kingdom; whether we are looking in the right places; where that might be; who might be the best people to help us to see the signs and understand them. Are we content to let the party continue, or do we want to ask ourselves where fullness of life really comes from. Where it is that we find abundance and generosity. There can be so many distractions, keeping us from seeing clearly. Yet by taking the time to enter into this beautiful story, we can open our eyes to all that the disciples saw, and thereby prepare ourselves to open our eyes to the signs of God's kingdom here in Cuddington.

Amen