

**Epiphany 2**  
**20/1/2013**

**Mark the Evangelist**

**Isaiah 62:1-5**

**Psalm 36**

**1 Corinthians 12:1 - 11**

**John 2:1 -11**

### **The first sign - a marriage between heaven and earth**

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The season of Epiphany begins with the coming of the star and continues as a celebration of the breaking in of the light of God into our lives. This light comes like the dawning of a new day, or as is beam of light to comfort and guide us into the right path. Today what it heralds is a marriage between heaven and earth, a relationship that is nourishing and deeply satisfying, in all respects for all who pay attention to the light.

The themes of nourishment and satisfaction can be found in Isaiah and in John's Gospel. The word of the Lord came to Isaiah with such power he was unable to keep silent. He spoke of a season of salvation at a time when the people, who had been in exile, were suddenly able to return home. The nations would witness this happening as a vindication of the hand of God at work in the world. For decades a dispirited and forlorn people had suffered the scorn of their captors and felt a long way from God. Under the metaphor of marriage, which signifies the intimacy of God's faithful love towards the people, Isaiah spoke words of hope. Jerusalem [or Zion] pictured as a rejected and abandoned woman, is now reclaimed – married - and brought back to her former glory, glory which itself is a metaphor for the very presence of God who is acting to bring this about. Despite the people's experience of exile and feeling alienated from God, Isaiah's announcement is that God had chosen to renew their relationship. God would delight in them as a groom with a bride, rename them as beautiful and they would become like a golden crown in the hand of God. The covenant relationship between God and the people still stood. Heaven and earth were still joined. And now, hope was being reborn among them through the word of the prophet. [Many of these thoughts I owe to Howard Wallace, *Lectionary Resources for Year C*].

Weddings and wedding feasts are also common biblical ways of speaking about the coming of the Kingdom: the establishment of God's regime of transformed life in the world. With this in mind and the background from Isaiah, we have a framework for interpreting the meaning of the Wedding at Cana, the site of "first sign" where Jesus "revealed his glory", and his disciples came to believe in him [Jn 2:11].

When John uses the word "sign" he is talking about something more than what we think of as a miracles or aberrations of nature. Signs are the proclamation of activities in which there is complete agreement between what Jesus is doing and the character and power of God. They are not mere illustrations of the greater power and reality of God, they are the thing itself. In the OT, for example, the Exodus is a sign: a band of slaves found them selves set free by a power not their own, and through this became a people in their own right. The exodus was God at work as creative, life-giving energy present in the world for them. All that we say about the Exodus, is true for the Resurrection. Signs are actions of God that create a people of faith. Signs feed faith and give rise to controversy over faith.

John's first sign was a wedding that took place "on the third day". By now we must realize that, even though Jesus says his "hour" has not come, the only way to hear these words is from the future perspective of "the hour" in which he endured the cross and resurrection. The Wedding at Cana took place on the third day. John's "first sign" starts with a wedding, an image of the covenant and the Kingdom that points us forward to the new life of Easter. From the beginning, John wants us to know that in Jesus Christ the power of God dwelt among us, and in a situation of crisis and loss revealed itself as transforming power. This one thing shapes the whole of John's Gospel.

There is a theologian (Dhorme, J.J. Von Allmen, *Vocab of the Bible*, article on Wine,) who says that the tree of life was a vine. As far as the Promised Land is concerned, this may well have been true. If bread, the symbol from the Exodus sustains us now, wine is associated with the promised future, and some say its intoxicating power is an inkling or a foretaste of paradise and the life that is to come.

While the Bible does not condone drunkenness or the misuse of wine, wine is a deep and rich Biblical symbol for everything that is life giving. It symbolizes the promised land the future joy and the blessedness of union with God. Wine is for life, wine is for rejoicing wine is for celebrating our relationship with God. There are times when the prophets refrain from wine, but in the Gospels, when "the Bridegroom – Jesus Christ - is present" his disciples do not fast, they feast. This is what happens at Cana in Galilee.

But on the third day in Cana of Galilee, "the wine gave out". This was a situation of significant embarrassment. Here were people deprived of all that symbolized the deep joy of the covenant with God that is taken up in marriage. Was the host ill prepared? Had the people drunk to excess already? More importantly all sign of hope and promise had been lost, just as it had been in Egypt, and in exile. The sign that follows gives us a picture of what happens at the Wedding feast of life when the true Bridegroom is present among the people. When he is there the Kingdom is amongst us: and heaven and earth – divine life and human life - are joined as they are meant to be. The situation of critical loss is transformed into one of abundant blessing.

People argue about the ethics of that amount of wine [potentially 800 bottles!] and whether it was alcoholic, and whether the wine ran out because the people were already drunk, but this is to miss the point. They had no wine. Of themselves they were not capable of providing what the grace of God gives. When the Bridegroom is present at the wedding feast of Life - even before his hour has come - he is the purveyor of immeasurable, deeply satisfying joy. It is satisfying because it is good wine, the best - not second rate or immature but well aged and rich. And it unexpectedly comes at the end, when normally we expect the worst. At the wedding at Cana the wine that comes last with Jesus is the end-time wine. The ingredient that transforms our limited resources is wine that flows from the well-aged promises of God, who kept it until the time was right to throw a fantastic party for all to enjoy.

John begins his Gospel by telling us that God's energizing presence, the Word, became flesh and dwelt among us. Then he proceeds to show us a series of signs that demonstrate that: "what came into being with him was life, and that life was the light of all [Jn 1:4]. This is the light of life that is proclaimed in the first sign, at Cana in Galilee where in a situation of crisis and loss grace was at work to demonstrate that God is wedded to there being a relationship with us that is enduring, nourishing and deeply satisfying.

We were talking with friends about the experience of attending worship. One of them described a service she had been to and said: "I was satisfied at every level".

This is not Cana in Galilee, but in a small way every act of worship, particularly where the Eucharist is celebrated, is meant to be a repeat of the wedding feast. Every act of worship is meant to be a place where, through the grace of God, the words the music the silence and the symbolism are transformed in such a way that we are renewed, reaffirmed and nourished in our relationship with God: so that we are "satisfied at every level". Not once, but always.

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