

Farewell Sermon *from Bishop Mark* before his departure

On the front of our service sheet it says "The Second Sunday of Epiphany". But because we celebrated the coming of the wise men on a Sunday and not on the traditional date of January the 6th, this feels for us like the third Sunday of Epiphany. Three Sundays and three epiphanies. Three revelations of the glory of Christ.

First there's the one I've already mentioned – the coming of the wise men from the East. Not Jews, but they came looking for a new-born King of the Jews. Yet what they found was something more. To them he was revealed as King of all peoples. Secondly, last Sunday, we remembered the Baptism of Jesus, when he was revealed as the Son of God, his Father's Beloved. Thirdly and today, we come to the wedding in the village of Cana in Galilee, when he transforms water into wine. As the Gospel says, "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him." Glory, glory, and glory – "the glory as of the only Son of the Father," as it says in the Christmas Gospel.

To some it is given to see and believe. And for those who see and believe these three events are revelations of glory. At the same time, all three scenes are very ordinary. What is more everyday than a mother and a new-born child? Nevertheless the wise men knelt down and worshipped him. Then, when we come to the Baptism of Jesus, remember what David pointed out to us last Sunday – how Jesus took his inconspicuous place in the queue and waited his turn with everyone else. Nevertheless, John the Baptist recognised who he was and said: "I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven, and it stayed on him." And thirdly, what is more naturally human than a wedding? Yet Jesus uses the occasion to reveal his glory to his disciples. As the Gospel says, "He revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."

There is a pattern here. It goes right through the Bible. God is there, if only we will look and listen, in the most ordinary things. Think of Elijah on the mountain side. God passes by. But God isn't in the wind; God isn't in the earthquake; God isn't in the fire. But after the fire there is "a sound of sheer silence", and that is where Elijah hears God speaking.

But now let us go back to that wedding. Not very far from here, in the Barber Institute in the University of Birmingham, there is a picture of the

marriage at Cana. It is 350 years old, painted by the Spanish painter Murillo to celebrate the wedding of a rich merchant in Seville. The bride and bridegroom are sitting behind a long table which is covered by a fine linen cloth loaded with plates full of food. At one end of the table there are the servants with the water pots that had been used by the guests to purify their hands before eating. At the other end there are Jesus and his mother. She, quite literally, is in the shade. It is no accident that Jesus and his mother are there on the edge. It isn't their party. The party belongs to the bride and the groom. Jesus and his mother are guests.

If painters want to tell a story, they can, if they want, paint a kind of strip cartoon, showing one scene after another. But usually they choose just one significant moment in their story. Our painter has chosen the moment at which Jesus is pointing to the water pots and telling the servants to fill them up to the brim. We can see one of the servants pouring the water. Nobody except Jesus and Mary and the servant notice what is happening. Everybody else is talking their heads off. But it is the moment of hidden miracle. In a few minutes time the servants will draw out some of the water – and it will be wine. The miracle will have happened, and nobody will have seen it happening. It is like Easter morning. Nobody sees the moment of resurrection. Mary Magdalene and the disciples arrive at the tomb and find that Jesus is up before them.

And here is the clue to John's telling of the story of this marriage at Cana. It points forward to the day of resurrection. It speaks of the Christ who makes all things new.

We can take a hint from our picture and apply this to marriage itself. The picture shows us a day of celebration, the beginning of a marriage. Yet, as those of us who have been married know very well, every marriage has its flaws and its fractures, its griefs as well as its joys. Why? Because all of us are flawed and fractured human beings. But Jesus, as our hidden guest, can transform our flaws and failures into means of grace and re-creation.

Many years ago, before the M11 was built, my family and I lived in Cambridge. So when we were visiting friends in London, we had to drive along the A11 through place like Leytonstone. At one bend in the

road there was a Baptist church with a large placard outside it for all to read: "REAL PEACE IS JESUS IN YOUR MARRIAGE."

It made us laugh. But there was something in it. Left to themselves, all our relationships are flawed. But Jesus as our hidden guest can bring real peace, a healing peace to us. Not a papering over of cracks, but a profound peace that creates new life out of our faults and failures. This is the kind of peace of which Jesus was speaking when he appeared to his disciples on the day of resurrection. "Peace be with you," he said, and showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. Peace built out of the acceptance and healing of hurt and pain. The peace of new life and resurrection.

Back again to our picture. It shows a wedding feast. But at first glance it looks very much like pictures of the Last Supper – a long table with people around it on three sides, but with the bride and groom in the centre instead of Jesus. This isn't accidental. Our artist is using his picture of Jesus changing water into wine at the wedding to point us to his transformation of bread and wine into his body and blood every time that we take our place with his disciples around his table. One moment of transformation to remind us of another. The Jesus who revealed his glory to his disciples when he changed water into wine – he reveals his glory to us every time we come to his table and find bread and wine transformed into his risen body. To those who see and believe he reveals his glory again and again.

But that's not the end of the matter. Jesus doesn't transform the water into wine for people just to look at it in astonishment. He gives them the wine for them to drink. It is the same with the eucharist. The Holy Spirit that came down upon Jesus at his baptism comes down to transform the bread and wine we bring to the altar, not only for our adoration and worship, but so that we can eat and drink and ourselves be changed. As the old church fathers said again and again, the Son of God has shared our life so that we may share his. He became human to make us divine.

The bread and wine are changed so that we may be changed. We eat and drink so that the risen Jesus may live in us. Even now, in this broken world, we can begin to do what he did, which is to live the life of heaven in earth.

And what is this life? It is the Lord's own life of mutual and self-giving life, his new life of forgiveness and re-creation. When we come to his table on earth, we take our places at his table in heaven with angels and archangels and all the company of saints. Not longer with Jesus as our guest. Here at his table he is the host and we are the guests. Here love bids us welcome.