

The Second Sunday of Epiphany

Isaiah 62.1—5

1 Corinthians 12.1—11

John 2.1—11

The story of the wedding at Cana is an intriguing one. The dynamic between Jesus and his mother is fascinating, as is the nature of the miracle.

The Gospels that emerged in the first few Christian centuries, under the guidance of God, as the ‘canonical’ ones are very reticent about Jesus’ childhood. John and Mark don’t mention it at all; Matthew goes straight from the Christmas stories to the baptism of Jesus; and Luke has one story of the 12-year-old boy in the temple. Some of the other writings that were circulating among Christians in the early centuries are not so restrained. They tell stories of a miraculous boyhood, of a child whittling a bird out of wood and then giving it life to fly away. Considering the human temptation to biographies, it is very interesting that the common mind of the Church rejected these stories as not essential to our faith. There are all kinds of reasons for this, but one thing that is noticeable about the four Gospels that we base our lives on is their drivenness — they tell a story that leads inexorably to the cross, and nothing is included that is not vital to that story.

But the interaction between Jesus and his mother in this first miracle story in John’s Gospel does suggest that Jesus’ childhood was not completely ordinary. Why did Mary expect Jesus to be able to do anything about the empty wine jars? What did she know about him? John’s Gospel does not tell us.

What it does show us is a gradual building of Jesus’ ministry. John’s description, in the previous chapter, of the calling of the first disciples shows Jesus as an attractive, teasing, compelling figure. People are drawn to him, and when they are with him, they know they are at the heart of something wonderful.

And then comes this lovely, happy wedding story. Jesus is there with his friends, who are already, John implies, a recognized group, invited together to the wedding. Mary, the bossy, affectionate mother takes no notice at all of Jesus’ attempt to avoid doing a sign. ‘My hour has not yet come,’ he tells her, but Mary clearly feels it is her place to decide when his hour had come, not his. She treats him almost like a sulky boy, who just needs humouring and cajoling into performing. And perform he does. Why does he do it? Only Mary, the servants and the disciples know what has happened. Does it set up all kinds of false impressions in the minds of those closest to Jesus? Does Mary

expect to continue to control his ministry? Do the disciples congratulate themselves on throwing in their lot with someone who is going to give them such a good time? If there is any such implied uncertainty in John's narrative, then the shock of the cleansing of the temple, which immediately follows this story, is even greater. The picture of happiness and harmony is shattered as Jesus comes face to face with the reality of his mission and we, the readers, begin to sense the escalation of tension, the beginnings of the mighty conflict between darkness and light.

John tells us that this miracle at Cana was a revelation and a confirmation of faith for the disciples. They saw the exuberant, creative power of God at work in bringing uncomplicated human enjoyment to this wedding. Through the rest of their time with Jesus they had to learn many other kinds of things about God's power, not all of them palatable, but this streak of anarchic joy is characteristic of God as we encounter him through Jesus.

It is the point that is made for us by the reading from 1 Corinthians. God works in a wild variety of ways, and does not always follow our rules. Although there is an inherent consistency in our encounters with God, we will see it only if what we are looking for is the shape of Jesus. The point of our faith is to enable us to say, and live, 'Jesus is Lord'. Sometimes, Paul tells us, this will be accompanied by very satisfying gifts of power, but they are not the point. The point is to build a worshipping community, made up of people whose lives are directed to God. This community will rejoice in the exercise of gifts that help it to grow, but they won't care who has the power to speak, or heal or work miracles, so long as the community as a whole is learning to say, 'Jesus is Lord'. To see the Holy Spirit at work, building a people to praise and worship, to recognize this power, that is the true spiritual gift, one that we are all called to exercise.

*Jane Williams
from 'Lectionary Reflections'*

Prayer

Almighty God,
in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives
make known your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.