



Reflections & Prayers for Epiphany 3

24 January 2021



The Wedding at Cana

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Readings for this Sunday

These are the readings for this Sunday which you may like to read in your bibles at home.

Genesis 14.17-20

Revelation 19: 6-10

John 2: 1-11

The Wedding at Cana

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.

Reflection from Richard - Bishop of Bedford

Now standing there were six stone water-jars each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

Who has inspired you as a Christian? Who by their life and example has encouraged you in your believing and discipleship?

When I ponder that, the answer is many people – indeed I’m a Christian in part because of the way I have seen Christ in others?

Who has inspired me? Well, I think of Desmond Tutu and a very special ten minute one-to-one I had when he came to Leicester some years ago to receive an honorary doctorate. His courage in standing up to apartheid, his contribution to building reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa, and his wide witness to the love of God keep on challenging me.

Who has inspired me? It is not just the Desmond Tutu’s of this world. It is Sheila who was part of our congregation on a tough housing estate in Sheffield. Life had been hard for Sheila; her husband had been in and out of jail; one son was estranged from her; but she has a deep well of faith that bubbled over. I will never forget her standing up in front of one of the posh congregations across the city and simply saying ‘I want to tell you about a friend’; ‘I want to tell you about Jesus’. And she did

Or from the same era June who was local Methodist on a neighbouring estate. June was on benefit and had little to call her own. Yet it was June who probably taught me more about giving than anyone else. I recall her at a study group talking about how she did her giving – ‘when I receive my money I put ten percent to one side, before I pay anything else’. ‘If I don’t she said ‘I know it won’t be there at the end of the week’. She knew what it was to give of our first fruits, not our last fruits to the Lord.

Who has inspired me? Desmond, Sheila, June and many more. And what connects them – not just their passionate faith which for each of them is very real; but on reflection I see that it is also that they have discovered the gift of abundance; of God’s abundance being released through them. An abundance of courage and hope in Desmond Tutu; an abundance of trust and faithfulness in Sheila; an abundance of generosity in June – the Spirit in each of them setting them free for life as God intends.

Now standing there were six stone water-jars each holding twenty or thirty gallons

I still remember sitting there as a young teenager in church doing the calculation as my vicar preached on this Gospel. I fear I rather missed the rest of what he said as I contemplated the huge amount of wine that became available and the rather liquid party that followed!

It is an absurd amount of wine – (and yes I know the number of guests may have been large and the strength much weaker than we assume today); but it is an absurd amount especially given that they had already finished off the initial supplies. But as we know that's not the point; this is about a God who provides more than we need; who is a God of abundance – think of the net full to breaking point; the twelve baskets of food left over after feeding the five thousand; the crops growing a hundredfold – a God whose love is overflowing and without measure.

This is the new wine of the kingdom symbolising the abundance of life that Jesus desires for us; that stands in stark contrast to the self-centred meanness that so often is the order of the day.

Quite perversely our lectionary version omits at the very start that the wedding took place on the 'third day' – a clear link to the resurrection of Jesus and the new wine of the kingdom. The old order represented by those jars for the Jewish rite of purification is giving way to the living water of the new order.

Now standing there were six stone water-jars each holding twenty or thirty gallons

So what is God saying to you and me today?

It is an invitation to let the spirit work in our lives – to let God loosen all that is tight and restricting within us so that the love, the grace, the generosity, the hope can flow from us.

And if that sounds easy it isn't. Just think for a moment – have you ever tried to teach someone to be more generous? It is hard work - we all think we are generous, but most of us aren't that generous and some will be profoundly angry by the accusation. And yet when the Spirit gets to work suddenly our so-called generosity seems miserly and giving seems so much

easier ... and that's true of all the gifts of the spirit. Let the spirit free, be open to the new wine. The new wine of the kingdom.

Just before she moved to Shropshire to be Archdeacon of Ludlow Fiona Gibson talked about one of her parishes. Earlier last year they were heading for a significant deficit. By the end of the year they has raised all the money and paid their share in full. How did this happen – Fiona simply said 'we prayed about it'. The Spirit was at work, God's abundance was present, the new wine of the kingdom flowed.

It is an absurd amount of wine; but then equally absurd is what the Spirit can do through us if only we set it free!

Prayers

Collect

Almighty God,
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles
the wonder of your saving presence:
renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness
sustain us by your mighty power;
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

Blessed are you, Sovereign God, creator of all,
to you be glory and praise for ever.
You founded the earth in the beginning
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
In the fullness of time you made us in your image,
and in these last days you have spoken to us
in your Son Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.
As we rejoice in the gift of your presence among us
let the light of your love always shine in our hearts,

your Spirit ever renew our lives and
your praises ever be on our lips.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Blessed be God for ever.

For those in pain

Lord God, whose Son, Jesus Christ,
understood people's fear and pain
before they spoke of them,
we pray for those in hospital;
surround the frightened with your tenderness;
give strength to those in pain;
hold the weak in your arms of love,
and give hope and patience
to those who are recovering;
we ask this through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

As our saviour taught us, so we pray
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen

Parish Prayers for the week ahead

In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	The Church of Bangladesh
Monday	The Diocese of Akure – The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)
Tuesday	The Diocese of Alabama – The Episcopal Church
Wednesday	The Diocese of Alaska – The Episcopal Church
Thursday	The Diocese of Saint Albans – The Church of England
Friday	The Diocese of Albany – The Episcopal Church
Saturday	The Diocese of Algoma – The Anglican Church of Canada

In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	Parish of Meppershall (Deanery of Ampthill and Shefford)
Monday	Parish of Millbrook (Deanery of Ampthill and Shefford)
Tuesday	Parish of Milton (Deanery of Ampthill and Shefford)
Wednesday	Parish of Pulloxhill (Deanery of Ampthill and Shefford)
Thursday	Parish of Ridgmont (Deanery of Ampthill and Shefford)
Friday	Parish of Shefford (Deanery of Ampthill and Shefford)
Saturday	Parish of Shillington and Gravenhurst (Deanery of Ampthill and Shefford)

For the homes and families in:

Sunday	Grove Avenue, Grove Road
Monday	Hadleigh Court, Hammondswick
Tuesday	Hatching Green, Hatching Green Close
Wednesday	Hawsley Road, Hawthorn Close
Thursday	Heath Close, High Elms
Friday	High Firs Crescent, Highfield Avenue
Saturday	Kingcroft Road, Kings Court

The Sick:

Amy, Claire, Jo, Sue, Christine, Hermione, Karen, Enid, Chris, Sophie and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

For the recently deceased:

Peter Redsell, Diana Turner, Patricia Tollworthy, Susan Eastwood.

On their year's mind:

Pauline Oswald, Donald Stevenson, Peter Walters, David Griffiths.

Church opening:

The coronavirus continues to spread alarmingly. It is because of that and in the light of government advice to stay at home whenever possible that it has been decided to close the church. **It is now only open on Sunday after the service (which will continue) until 4pm.** The decision will be reviewed as circumstances change but in any event before the end of February.

A reminder... of this phone service:

Daily Hope – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.

Church at home:

We are delighted to produce each week these printed papers. If you would prefer not to receive these papers each week, please let Julie in the parish office know. If you are aware of others in the parish who would also value the opportunity to worship at home in this way, do please contact a member of the Ministry team or Julie (Parish Office Tel: 01582 712776).