

Sunday 17th January – Jesus turns water into wine

Hello again, or for those of you who I am meeting today for the first time; hello – delighted to meet you☺! I look forward to getting to know you better and this week has been a good one for me in getting started at St. Luke's.

This week's sermon connects directly with last week's. We saw Jesus at his baptism hand himself over to the will of the Father, that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit. We saw that we are called to do the same. We saw how dearly loved we are, all of us, as expressed in the wonderful words of Isaiah 43. I recommend you read such words regularly.

In today's sermon we find that we are at a wedding. Again water is a powerful symbol. But unlike the 'death and resurrection' symbolism of baptism, today we see Jesus as being the one who can truly transform us.

But first...a joke ☺. No bacon tree today. Instead a panda, a panda who loves pizza and one day goes to his local Boston Pizza. He orders everything on the menu and I mean everything. All the starters, pizzas and every desert. He eats the lot. Quietly and tidily. He finishes his meal with a coffee at which time the server brings him the bill. Then the panda does something unexpected – he pulls a small water-pistol from his pocket, squirts the server in their left ear and runs out of the building. The manager is outraged and runs after the panda, catches him and then asks the key question: "Why??? We have given us the best of our service and then squirted water at my staff. Why??" The panda is genuinely bemused and explains that; "This is who we are. This is what we do. Go and check on google if you don't believe me." So the manager, having got payment out of the panda returns to his office and, turning on his computer, googles 'panda'. This is what he reads. 'Panda. Found in China and Tibet'. (are you ready☺...) 'eats shoots and leaves'. Ha☺! 'Eats shoots and leaves'...

The panda misunderstood who he was and therefore how he was to live. My experience, in my own life and as a minister, is that we as Christians can be slow to understand who we are and therefore how we should live.

You are dearly loved by God. Uniquely created and gifted by the Father who loves you. He did not make a mistake when he made you. In fact, he cannot love you any more than he does at this moment. He will not love you less. As His beloved son and daughter, He has grafted you into his body, the Church. Jesus is our head and he has gifted you uniquely with gifts and talents. You know what this means? Jesus has an important part for you to play. He knows the church needs you for, being uniquely created and gifted by the Holy Spirit, you can do things that no one else can do. Not me, not Joanne, Keith, Kathy, neither Bishop Jane nor the Archbishop of Canterbury or even the Apostle Paul. That is how special you are! You are gathered today in a group of very special people. We'll look at this in more detail next week when the lectionary takes us into the rest of 1 Corinthians 12. In the meantime, there is only one question we need to ask ourselves: 'do we believe how special we are, that we are uniquely gifted and Jesus wants to use us, in the church, for His glory and the building up of the Kingdom? Do you?? Do you believe you are that special?? Do you live your life accordingly?? Do you walk out of the door with both the swagger and the humility that comes from being a person whom God considers worth the life of His Son, whose prayers He delights to hear, who has the Spirit of Jesus within, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father is pleased to pour upon you? Is that how you live? I hope so, for that's who you are☺!! In the light of such news we usually respond with feelings of disbelief and ordinariness. I'm that special!??? Really???? I can do things that the Apostle Paul couldn't?? Really???? 'I am just normal, ordinary me', we tend to say. Ordinary us – yes we are. But we have an extraordinary Saviour and Redeemer.

In the turning of the water into wine Jesus is showing us what he can do with 'ordinary'.

You know the story. A wedding banquet has run out of wine. Mary seems to be in charge of the catering and tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them to do. That's good advice☺. So Jesus tells them – see the ceremonial jars over there – fill them with water. I wish I was there to see their faces☺! I imagine them saying: "We have run out of wine! Why are we filling the foot-washing jars??!!!" ☺.

And these jars contain, verse six tells us, 80-120 litres of water. And there are six of them. Let's say they contain 100 litres each. That's 600 litres. A litre of water weighs a kilogram! That's 600 kilograms or, if you prefer, 1320 pounds weight. How long did it take them??

I picture them with their buckets/jars walking to the well, filling the buckets with water, walking back to the ceremonial jars and chatting all the way – “why are we doing this?” and the head servant saying “doesn’t matter! Get on with it!” ☺

However long it took them, they finish and go to Jesus who then says to do something they would find even more bizarre. I picture Jesus, with a twinkle in His eye saying “Excellent. Thank you – now serve it up – take some to the master of the banquet.” Again – I’d love to see the picture of their faces. Who did they get to take it☺? The apprentice☺?? Whoever it was – this was the reaction:

“..the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside¹⁰ and said, ‘Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.’ John 2:9-10.

I love that☺ - “though the servants who drew the water knew”... ☺

But what has Jesus done? Taken the ordinary and made it extraordinary. Not just water into any wine but the best he’d ever tasted. Jesus has turned water into alcohol – which is a powerful, cleansing and disinfecting agent.

So however ordinary we believe ourselves to be, it’s nothing compared to Jesus’ transforming power.

So seeing ourselves as we really are, as Jesus sees us – is very important for our growth...

‘The tea with milk illustration...’

(The Holy Spirit in us like tea poured into milk (the British always put the milk in first ☺) – the milk (us) doesn’t have to disappear or get out of the way or stay very small, the tea (Spirit) pours in to make a refreshing drink and you can’t tell where the milk ends and the tea begins)