

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 84

Sunday 24th January 2021

'Virtually Church but with some way to go...'

Welcome

Welcome to this Sunday's edition of Cutting Edge Camelot.

Scripture Passages

John 2: 1-11

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

St John, in his Gospel, records seven miracles as signs showing that Jesus was the Messiah and, more than that, that God was in him (“... and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”, as he put in his prologue).

John wants us to know that in Jesus heaven and earth coincide. In him, we see what God is like, in the limited form of a human being. In him, we see someone who lived on earth the eternal life of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Today’s reading describes the first of those signs. The setting is a village wedding. Everyone in the village would have been invited, plus friends and relatives from nearby villages such as Nazareth. It was to be a memorably happy day for the bride and bridegroom and their families. But disaster threatens. The wine has run out long before the celebrations have ended. A joyful day is about to be swamped in embarrassment and social disgrace. Mary tells Jesus before the news gets out. The rest we know.

As a sign, it is a bit of an oddity. All attention is centred on the bride and bridegroom, and rightly so. This is their day. Jesus doesn’t want to do anything that would divert attention away from them. So his miracle is performed in secret. There are no crowds to be amazed and give thanks to God, no Pharisees ready to criticise. Mary is confident that Jesus will do something, without knowing quite what. The disciples are not involved (presumably they found out later). Apart from Jesus, only the servants know what has happened, and they say nothing. It seems to have been a sign intended, initially, for Mary and the disciples, and no one else.

The story is full of symbolism. The water jars “for the Jewish rites of purification” (you were expected to wash your hands, in a prescribed manner, both before the meal and between each course) stand for the Law and the Prophets. There are six of them, when seven was considered the number of completeness, showing that the Law and the Prophets will take us only so far. The new wine (Jesus and his teaching) was like the wine that had been served so far (the OT), but much better. There was a huge quantity of it, symbolic of the almost reckless abundance seen in God’s creation (witness *The Perfect Planet* currently on TV).

The commentaries point out much more. Jesus addresses his mother in a perfectly respectful manner, although it sounds rude to us. Mary appears only twice in John’s Gospel, now when Jesus’ “hour” has not yet come, and later at the foot of the Cross when it finally has come. Mary shows complete trust in Jesus, telling the servants to do whatever he tells them. The servants are described by a Greek word from which we get the word “deacon”. So is this wedding feast an anticipation of the Eucharist? Is it an anticipation of the messianic banquet at the end of the present age? Are we to see Jesus as the true Bridegroom? And so on.

It’s all good stuff. But much of the detail appeals more to the head than to the heart. And there is a risk of exhaustion before we get to the climax to the story: Jesus “revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”

Let's go back a bit.

In St John's Gospel, Jesus has so far recruited five disciples. Two certainly, and all five probably, have come to believe that he is the Messiah, which is not to say that they understand what being the Messiah will mean.

Nathanael has called Jesus the Son of God, but only because that’s how people described a Messiah (belief in Jesus’ divinity won’t come until after the Resurrection). Four of the five have been recruited with the words “Come and see”. All have been drawn to Jesus by the kind of person they

have seen him to be, rather than by any teaching. They have beliefs about him. They don't yet have the commitment of believing "in" him

The wedding at Cana changes that. What moves the disciples to belief "in" Jesus is not that Jesus has shown himself to be a miracle worker, or even the miracle itself, as a miracle. It is that, through the miracle, Jesus has revealed something of the glory he shares with God his Father. He has given them a glimpse of the greatness of God's love, and of his own commitment to a life lived for others. He has done it through a self-effacing, self-forgetful act of kindness to a young couple and their families, done at a cost to himself (physical? mental? spiritual?) about which we can only speculate.

Through the miracle, Jesus has shown the disciples yet more of what he is like. One day they will realise that he has given them a glimpse of what God is like. For now, it is enough that they realise that here is someone who is not just the Messiah, but who has the answers to what life's all about and how it should be lived. And so they believe in him, and commit themselves to him.

We live in a country in which most people today seem to have turned their backs on religion, but where many are nevertheless searching for something (often identified by the word "spirituality") that a secular society can't provide, but the Christian faith does.

In St John's description of how Jesus recruited his first disciple, first he and then Andrew invite people to "come and see". Not come and hear what Jesus has to say, but come and see where he is living, how he lives his life, the kind of person he is.

That remains the best, and perhaps the only effective, way of carrying out the Church's mission to make disciples of all nations, including those close to home. Come and see. If our lives are lives lived for others, as Jesus' was, are lived to the full, and are characterised by love and joy and peace,

people who see may say to themselves, “They've got something I wish I had. It may not be what I've been looking for, but I think it's what's missing in my life at present.”

Our faith is a gift from God, and God gives it to different people in different ways. But sooner or later (sometimes very soon, sometimes after a long time) we, like the disciples at Cana, move from believing things about God and Jesus to believing in God and Jesus, with the trust and commitment that implies. Then we may find that, as Ron Oswald once said to me, “Once the Lord gets his foot in the door, George, one thing tends to lead to another” as God calls us to play whatever part, large or small, lay or ordained, that he has in mind for us.

Note: The Revd Ron Oswald was a retired priest who lived in the benefice and was a much-loved member of our ministry team. Those who remember him will hear his comment to me with his Northern Irish lilt. He seemed a most unmilitary man, but when he died it was revealed that he had once been a sergeant major. It was also his practice to read the psalms in Hebrew. There can't be many with that double qualification.

George

God's vision for the Deanery

Have you sensed God's heart for our area? Do you dream of what God longs to do in the lives of our friends and neighbours? Or are you struggling for vision amidst the uncertainty even though you know God is moving in our midst? If you relate to any of these, do join our time of listening and prayer for God's vision and purposes to be established in the Deanery.

This is on Thursday 28th January at 7 pm via Zoom. Please let Tristram know if you would like to be included in this event and he will then arrange for you to receive the Zoom invitation.

Vimeo

We are planning to produce some more Vimeo videos and hope to be able once more to draw on the assistance and technical expertise of Dan Gruner and his colleagues. The first of these should be available within the next fortnight.

Meanwhile the Diocese's service with a reflection from our assistant Bishop Alastair Redfern is available for this Sunday. You will find this by going to the diocesan page on the Vimeo website, <https://vimeo.com/user131166676>.

Hymn Suggestion

A hymn which focusses on the difference which God's love in Christ makes to our lives is 'Come down, O Love divine.'

Points for Prayers

- For our spiritual growth and discipleship, that we may live in such a way that our lives cause others to be hungry to know God and Jesus for themselves
- The restrictions of the third lockdown and sustaining our common life in this time
- The roll out of the different vaccines in combating coronavirus
- Thanksgiving for care, skill and courage of NHS workers and those in care homes
- Those suffering from coronavirus in hospitals, care homes and at home
- Our Bishops (please see notice below)

- For North Cadbury Church Primary School and other local schools as they are unable to open fully at the start of the new school term
- Prayers for those affected economically by the lockdown, for businesses and those who have become unemployed
- Prayers and thanksgiving for contributions to the foodbanks and for those helping to take these to the foodbanks.

Suspension of services

Services across the Camelot Group have now been suspended as sadly we concluded that it was not possible to hold them safely in the current circumstances. The suspension of services will be kept under review as circumstances change.

Excalibur

The January edition of Excalibur is available online at camelotparishes.co.uk

The Parish Office

The Parish Office is closed although Rob does come in regularly. In his absence please contact Rob via email (office@camelotparishes.org.uk) or on 01749 850934.

Update on Bishop Peter

Bishop Peter thanks everyone for all the cards and other expressions of support which he has received. A card was sent to him on behalf of the Camelot Parishes as a whole. He says that he has been lifted on 'eagle's wings' through the love and prayers of others. He has now received a stem cell transplant. Please pray for the new cells to 'do their bit' and for his

continued healing. Please continue to pray for him and his family in this challenging time. Please pray also for Bishop Ruth and the rest of the Bishop's Staff as they take on the oversight of the diocese in his absence.

Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family

*We pray that 'we might live in love,
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us'*

(Ephesians 5:2)