

19 January, 2025 - Arnhem-Nijmegen, Year C, Epiphany 2 – Revd Dorienke de Vries

Readings: Is 62.1-5; Ps 36.5-10; 1 Cor. 12.1-11; John 2.1-11

Hymns: 90, 60, O holy Father, 122

The Collect

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**

The Sermon

Let us pray:

*O God, the well of life,
make us bright with wisdom,
that we may be lightened with the knowledge of your glory
in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

If we want to see God's glory we have to look for it in unexpected places. I think – I hope – that by now we know God well enough to be aware of that: that God's glory comes to us in unexpected ways and in unexpected places. Today's story is no exception. In John's account God's glory is revealed for the first time at a country wedding in Cana. A simple Jewish couple are taking their marriage vows, sharing their joy with their families and friends and village. And Jesus and his disciples are among the wedding guests, enjoying the party like everybody else.

Matthew, Mark and Luke have Jesus start his ministry by teaching and healing. Causing quite a stir by driving out demons and curing every kind of disease. Whenever people come to him with any kind of condition that is life-threatening or life-crippling, he will deal with it and restore them to full health. There is nothing of this kind of distress in John's story. Nothing life-threatening is at stake. Among Jesus' other miracles, this one stands out as an anomaly, one that is different. It's not so much about healing what was broken, but about providing what is lacking. Not so much from sickness to wholeness, but from scarcity to abundance.

John works with the language and the imagery of creation, and with the storyline of Genesis. His famous opening passage refers to creation: In the beginning was the Word. All things came into being through him. And Genesis tells us, that the first major event in this newly created world, is a wedding party. God himself marries Adam and Eve. And every single day after that he comes to take a stroll with them in the garden of delight, his delight as much as theirs. He is their guest, as much as they are his.

Very early on the love between these two people became one of the many models for the love between God and humankind, between God and his people. We noticed that in the reading from Isaiah, where God promises to take his people in marriage. And John's readers would have recognized the significance of Jesus' ministry starting at a wedding. He is saving the party on that particular day, certainly. But at the same time something universal is going on: he is saving the party that God started and intended at the beginning of time.

And he is doing so in a way that will be characteristic of his ministry throughout. I would like to point out three things to make this clear.

Firstly he chooses to work in the context of the normal, everyday life of simple, everyday people; it is this everyday life with all its ups and downs that is transformed from a place of struggle and scarcity to a place of joy and abundance. For his disciples, that is the place where they see his glory revealed. Those who look with the eyes of faith, will see God's glory revealed and his abundant grace at work in every moment of their lives.

These eyes of faith do not come to us easily – we have to train them. We have to pray that God will open them, take away our blindness, our unawareness of his presence; of the rivers of his delight that run through our lives. We need his light to see the light, to quote Psalm 36.

This applies to our individual lives, but also to the life of our church. It is one of the main themes to which I seem to return time and again: how do we find God's abundance and power in our scarcity of resources and weakness in numbers? We have to pray that God will open our eyes and make us aware of all his gifts, listing them as Paul does in 1 Corinthians.

Talking about lists, let me give a simple example: Last week I made a list of all our readers and intercessors, and I was truly amazed to see how long it was. In our small community, 26 people regularly offer their time and their voice to

read a lesson or to pray on behalf of the congregation; 26 people, apart from the organists and the clergy, regularly help to make our services happen. That is wonderful! That is common worship indeed! God is providing.

So that was the first: with the eyes of faith we can see that Jesus transforms the scarcity of our everyday lives into revelations of God's abundant glory.

Secondly: he wants to be asked. He will decide when and how he will answer to our need, but we have to ask. We need to make clear that we are aware of our blindness and our lack.

'They don't have any wine left.' No wine left, with still 4 days of partying to go! In a culture where lavish hospitality is a main virtue, this is a disaster. What a way to start your married life! It will be a stain on your reputation, something that people will whisper about behind your back for decades.

Apparently Mary has some inside information, and she decides to give Jesus a subtle hint. His response is not as rude as many translations make it sound. I can even detect a smile behind the words, something we might do if we understand a hint is being given. What's that to do with us? Don't think I don't see what you're after. But although his words are not rude, they're still an important assertion of his freedom from all human control. Whatever Jesus will do will not be dictated by anyone else's will or scenario.

No, not dictated. But Jesus has come to serve us. He uses his total freedom to respond to human need, brought before him in bold trust. We see that Mary is not taken aback at all. There must have been something, in his face or in the sound of his voice, that gives her the boldness to tell the servants to do whatever Jesus will say. She accepts that it is for him to decide when and how, but at the same time she trusts that he will show compassion for this young couple facing social disgrace. That he will provide when asked to do so.

So, one, Jesus transforms the scarcity of our everyday lives into revelations of God's abundant glory, and two, he does so when we ask him to provide what we need.

Thirdly, he has a preference for those who are usually disregarded. A simple country wedding of simple country people is the backdrop of the inauguration of his ministry. Not the temple in Jerusalem, not even the local synagogue. But even within the story we can see this dynamic playing out. It is the servants,

the slaves, who become his instruments. Without even questioning him, they do as he says. Imagine the faith that it must have taken. The person responsible for the party, the steward, must be tense and nervous about the lack of wine; and then you, as a slave, are told to fill the bathtub and from it take a cup of water to your panicking boss. But that's what they do. The steward and the bridegroom don't have a clue; but the slaves do. The only ones who were not partying, but just working their socks off to make everybody happy – those are the people whom Jesus lets in on the secret. They are used by him to save the day.

So there we have it: Jesus transforms the scarcity of our everyday lives into revelations of God's abundant glory, when we ask him to take away our blindness and to provide what we need. And he will often provide through the service of unlikely others in unexpected ways.

May God reveal his glory in our everyday lives; may he give us the grace to see it; and the humility to receive it out of the hands of those we tend to overlook. Amen.