

A Sermon by Emma Hodge at
St. Michael and All Angels Church, Sandhurst
on 21st January 2018 (Reflective style)

Speak Lord, your servants are listening, you have the words of eternal life. Amen

Introduction

A priest is driving home. A police officer behind the priest notices that he is swerving a little bit, so he pulls him over. "Sir", the officer asks "Have you been drinking a little bit tonight"? "Only water," the priest replies. The officer suspicious, shines his flashlight into the priest's car. He notices an empty bottle of wine in the passenger seat. The priest follows his eyes and cries "Good Lord", he's done it again!

Our gospel reading today features the miracle that is well known; it is referenced in jokes, books and movies. However these references only focus on the outstanding action, taking something that is ordinary and easy to come by, water, and turning it into something that is of the best quality, something fine and would have been expensive to buy, good quality wine and they overlook the actual meaning and context of the passage.

The passage is full of meanings and different aspects to explore and study, however as today is the third Sunday of Epiphany we will continue the Epiphany theme. One of the meaning of the word Epiphany is a sudden revelation. On the first Sunday of Epiphany the visit of the wise men were explored; last week, we looked at the calling of the first disciples as recorded by John's gospel and how we can discover Jesus, but back to today's reading, Verse 11 of the reading sums up why this reading is included in the epiphany season: *Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him¹.*

Background

Before we look in detail about revealing Jesus glory and enabling the first disciples to believe in Him, let's look at the background.

Jesus had just called some of his disciples and was at a wedding in a village called Cana, a few miles north of Nazareth. Cana was the home village of Nathaniel, one of the disciples that he had just called, also at the wedding was Mary, Jesus' mother. The wedding would have taken place over several days and the bridegroom would have been responsible for ensuring that there was sufficient wine for the entire celebration. Running out of wine would have been a major social embarrassment for the bridegroom and married life would not have started well for the couple.

Imagine

Now we've looked at the details, I want you to imagine that you are one of the first disciples who had only a short time earlier been called by Jesus and you had made

¹ John 2:11

the decision to leave the life you had been living to follow this, as you thought then, itinerant Jewish Rabbi called Jesus.

You are at the wedding celebrations in a village and are relaxing with the other people who had also joined as followers of Jesus, some had joined with you and some a bit earlier. The celebrations are well under way.

You see an older woman, who we know as Mary, who you have seen with Jesus earlier, come up and speak to Jesus, alerting him to the fact that the wine had run out, you witness the exchange between them. Jesus answer could seem harsh when he says that it is no concern of theirs and that His hour had not yet come. The enigmatic response of Jesus by the words “*my hour has not yet come*” but the explanation is that the hour that Jesus is referring to is the time when he is glorified and this is at the end of his earthly ministry when just before he goes into the garden of Gethsemane Jesus prays for his disciples while saying that his hour had come and asking God the father to glorify His Son².

What do you think Mary is expecting Jesus to do?

How do you feel?

Do you understand what Jesus is saying?

Do you think that Jesus is speaking harshly to her?

Once the exchange between Jesus and Mary had occurred then you watch as Jesus gives instructions to the servants to fill the stone water jars which held the water for the purification rituals (about 160 gallons in total) and you see the servants fill up the jars

Do you wonder what is going on?

Do you understand that something special is going to happen?

Do you wonder what will happen next?

Once the jars have been filled up, you see the servants draw out some liquid, you saw water going into the jars but it has changed, it is a different colour, the colour of wine which is the best quality. You see the servants go and present this to the chief steward who is in charge of the wine and you see him approving it.

What are you feeling now?

Do you understand what has happened? That ordinary water has somehow become changed into good quality wine?

² John 17:1

Once the disciples witnessed this, they realised that Jesus was not a normal Jewish wondering Rabbi, they saw God's glory through Jesus. When they saw God's glory then their faith changed. They believed in Jesus.

As understanding that Jesus is not just another wondering Jewish teacher, but the promised messiah comes to you (who else could take water and change into wine – there was nothing added to the water).

How are you feeling now that you have witnessed (and understood) Jesus revealing his Glory?

Glory

Glory is a recurring theme in John's gospel, in the opening chapter at verse 14 we are told that we can see God's glory in Jesus. *And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth*³.

Glory is one of those terms which nowadays is used predominately in church settings and we say it in every communion service, so let us look at what it actually means.

Glory has different meanings depending on the context, it can mean splendour and an example of this is when the angels told the shepherds that Jesus had been born and the "*Glory of the Lord shone around*"⁴, it can also mean great praise, which is the meaning in our reading from Revelation and when we say the Gloria; but in this instance it indicates that an aspect of God's character (including that of the character of Jesus, God's son) has been revealed and the character aspect is one of majesty. The majesty that is not of earthly kingship but one of God's.

Seeing the glory of god can result in people believing. The new disciples which Jesus had just called are good examples of this, however this experience is not just limited to the biblical disciples, It may be a case that when someone saw the Glory of the God, they became believers or it may be that their existing faith was renewed or strengthened.

You may be thinking that it is hard to see God's glory in today's world, but there are still times when he reveals' his glory to people, but then there is another challenge, that of recognising God's Glory.

When God reveal's his glory (part of his character) to us, then some of us will see it and others will not (the disciples saw Jesus glory but there is no record of anyone else seeing the glory).

The Character of God is complex and full of different aspects. Some may see the creator aspect of God in the natural world while others may see the same view on the same day and not see God.

³ John 1:14

⁴ Luke 2:9

- 1) What does God's glory mean to you?
- 2) Would you recognise God's glory if you saw it?
- 3) The disciples believed after they saw Jesus' glory revealed through the miracle of turning water into wine. Was there a particular instance in your life that helped you believe?
- 4) What can you do to reveal the glory of Jesus to our families and friends and help them recognise God's Glory

Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven⁵

⁵ Matthew 5:16 (From BCP Communion Service)