

Sunday 21st January 2018
Epiphany (B)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Genesis 14.17-20

NT: Revelation 19.6-10

G: John 2.1-11

I have always enjoyed treasure hunts, whether it was seeing that famous film of Treasure Island, as a child, who can forget Robert Newton's interpretation of Long John Silver, that started the love of them, but for me it was the thrill of identifying the signs and solving them to find the treasure at the end. That was so compelling. In more recent times I would energetically take part in car rally treasure hunts, travelling across the city recognising clues and solving, the winner being given the privilege of setting the next treasure hunt, hoping that the clues we set would enable the other teams to find the answers and be pointed to the destination where the prize was waiting. That didn't always work out, but that's another story perhaps that's why I enjoy the thriller genre so much currently Scandi Noir, with the authors placing the clues within the pages.

John's gospel is written in the same way as a kind of treasure hunt, with both careful and cryptic clues laid for us to arrive at the treasure the person Jesus.

The word John uses for clue is signs, setting a series of signposts to take us through his story. The signs are all occasions when Jesus did, what he had just promised Nathaniel that he would do. Moments when, the angels of God would be going up and coming down at the place where, he Jesus is. They are moments when heaven is opened and the transforming power of God's love bursts into the present world. All signs to point away from earth to a heavenly reality "The Word made flesh".

This incredible account, so early in John's gospel is the first recorded miracle of Jesus.

In the previous chapter John describes for us the calling of the first disciples in a way that shows Jesus as an attractive, compelling, teasing figure.

John calls what happened at Cana 'the first of his signs' - and to understand anything of its significance we need to understand what was going on in a Jewish wedding which would have been (and still is) a major celebration. After all the processions when they'd finally enter the groom's house, they'd eat tons of food and drink lots of wine - wine that usually had to be diluted with water, because traditional Jewish wedding celebrations didn't just last one evening like weddings do now - sometimes they could last a whole week! And in Jewish culture, it was the groom who was responsible for making sure that there was enough food and wine for everyone - and he paid for everything out of his own pocket, including paying off the bride's father!

So back to John's account - because he gives us some important information: he tells us that 'Jesus' mother was there; and that Jesus and his disciples had also been invited.'

"when the wine was gone, Mary said to Jesus, 'they have no more wine.'"

This was a real problem, not just a minor inconvenience, because under Jewish law, each family was obliged to provide a feast of food and wine that met the social standards of the community. And to run out of wine halfway through the wedding party would have made you the laughingstock of the community, ostracized and marked down for the future - probably for ever in community folklore!

And Jesus addresses her as "Woman" or " 'Dear Woman' instead of 'Mother.' His relationship with his mother is changing. From now on, instead of approaching Jesus as her son, Mary (like all of us) needs to learn to approach him as Lord, as Saviour - as the child of promise who was now beginning to fulfil his destiny: a destiny she knew all about.

Notice that Mary doesn't give any indication that she was offended or took this the wrong way. She simply says to the servants "Do whatever He tells you." She has no idea if Jesus is going to get involved or not. What she does know that if he does get involved, listen closely to him.

"Now standing there were six stone water-jars

It is important to understand that you really aren't supposed to drink water from those jars! Those were the ones set aside for ceremonial cleansing. What you're supposed to do is take a cup of water from the jar, and pour it over the top of your hand, letting the water run down your fingers. Then you'd take another cup and pour it over the other hand – that's all! So when Jesus instructed them to fill those jars with water, they were probably nudging each other in utter disbelief. And then when he said, "Now go and give some to the steward, they'd have been incredulous

"Do whatever he tells you, Mary said – however bizarre – and this most certainly was!"

And we're told he put the cup to his lips and tasted... vintage wine – nectar! So, not surprisingly he called out to the bridegroom and said, "Could you come over here for a minute?" "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 'til now! This wine is incredible!"

So, what's going on?

in this gospel, Are you getting a sense of something incredible happening here?

Well for one thing, no one really knows how it all happened. As far as we know, Jesus never waved his arm over the water pots. He never said, "I command this water to become wine!" He simply willed it to happen, and it happened. And isn't this the way Jesus still does his miraculous work today? – no hype, no fuss – he often acts in such a sublimely, low key, respectful way that many of us aren't even aware that something supernatural might be going on – even when it is!

In this Jesus' first miracle it is important to notice the the sheer quantity of the wine. Jesus made anywhere from 120 to 180 gallons of wine. Why? – because he's an extravagant, lavish giver of good gifts! The abundance of the wine is a symbol of God's love and grace. There's always enough for everyone and there's always some left over.

You see the same thing when Jesus feeds 5000 people in John chapter 6. Remember all the baskets of bread and fish left over? Jesus gives us everything we need – and more!

And the quality?! This wasn't the cheap plonk , or a 3 bottles for £10 deal - this was the choicest Premier Cru - first growth claret or burgundy. And he saved the best for last! The point is that those of us who invite Jesus into their situation find him saving the best things in life for last! We get this picture don't we of the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven!

Just one last thing: What's this about the ceremonial jars? Well Jesus is sending a message right from the word go that he's going to transform all the stuffy and restricted practices of Pharasaic Judaism that entrap people in feeling guilty - into the new wine of the Kingdom.

So this isn't about doing church and being religious – it's about the breaking in of something utterly and completely – outrageously new!.

Note the end of the reading. Jesus did this, the first of his signs in Cana of Galilee, and? revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him – put their trust in him. It changed their lives. This was all about the exuberant, creative power of God at work in bringing uncomplicated human enjoyment to a wedding – and through the rest of their time with Jesus they had to learn so many things about God's power at work – and not all of them palatable or easy to accept. But this streak of anarchic joy is so much like God as we encounter him in Jesus – God works in a rich variety of ways and doesn't always follow the rules!

The challenge of Epiphany is to invite Jesus into our situations – our lives – as Lord and Master – to show us what God's like – and let's do whatever he tells us – look what can happen...?!

Fr Bill Addy