

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany - 24<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Genesis 14:17-20; Psalm 128; Rev 19: 6-10; John 2:1-11

**Genesis 14:17-20** After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18 And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High.[a] 19 He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; 20 and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything.

**Psalm 128** Happy is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways. 2 You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you. 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. 4 Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. 5 The LORD bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. 6 May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

**Rev 19:6-10** 6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; 8 to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. 9 And the angel said<sup>Ⓜ</sup> to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words of God." 10 Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant<sup>Ⓜ</sup> with you and your comrades<sup>Ⓜ</sup> who hold the testimony of Jesus.<sup>Ⓜ</sup> Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus<sup>Ⓜ</sup> is the spirit of prophecy."

**John 2:1-11** On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So, they took it. 9 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 10 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." 11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Mary said...almost whispered, to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." DO whatever he tells you; not, 'Hear whatever he tells you,' but, DO it.

A week ago, I attended an on-line webinar, 'Sharp Writing for Digital Platforms'. Jermaine Dallas said strong writing educates, entertains, provides identity, creates community and elicits a reaction through characters, conflict, themes and structure. He also said a reader of any text takes 5.59 seconds before deciding whether or not to continue.

So, let's dive right in... here is John's 5.59 seconds: '*On the third day, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there*'.

John starts with time, 'On the third day'. To the author, writing over 80 years after Jesus lived and, of course to us, a virtual congregation over 2,000 years later, that phrase is hammered through with significance. We hear an echo of the resurrection narratives. The end at the beginning. We hear deliberate writing, setting time but also theme, conflict and structure in three words!

Cana sets the place, connecting the reader with Nazareth, only 4 miles away. '*Can anything good come from Nazareth?*' will be rattling around your brain, I'm sure. To the villagers, to us and all generations in between, a wedding is a celebration of Love, Joy and Hope for the future. When John wrote, Christians were being horribly persecuted and the wedding feast had become a powerful image of the future glory of the Messiah's reign, as we heard in the Revelation reading, '*Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb*', laid on for those who '*hold the testimony of Jesus*' and worship God!

Add to this the third, almost throw away sentence ending, '*and the mother of Jesus was there*', and we are hooked! In a Jewish home, the woman, 'Mother' was the centre of family life. She lit candles to bless and begin Shabbat. She had prepared everything, and everyone, for 24 hours of rest, as God had commanded in the beginning. Mother oversaw day to day life. At a wedding celebration lots of people's mothers would have been there so why mention Mary rather than the bride's mother? Again, it's deliberate, providing identity and creating community in which Mary would have a key role to play immediately and long after '*the third day*'.

Women, as you know, are rarely mentioned in the Gospels so when they are, this elicits a response. In public, the Jewish Mother was to be seen and not often heard so, for Mary to be telling her son the wine was running out, [how did she know?] maybe she knew something was afoot. Jesus' response, strangely, was to deny the problem. He knew '*his time*', as John names it, was coming but he appeared to be unsure when, and he said so. Mary on the other hand, as his Mother, recognised a moment. She knowingly ignores Jesus' comment and speaks to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you'.

In this way, Mary has a hand in unleashing the beginning of the end, the first 'sign' John calls it. What a Jewish Mother! Her years of heart-pondering were coming to fruition, over wine! Not just any old wine...and not just a few bottles...but THE best wine and literally gallons of it, from six stone [read heavy, cold and unwieldy] water jars, used for Jewish washing rituals.

So much is being said in these 5.59 seconds, bubbling up and over, for those who wanted to understand the Gospel writer's Good News: Firstly, an undercurrent of Jesus' conflict with Judaism and its traditions. Secondly, that the role of the Messiah would be nothing like past assumptions or expectations. Thirdly, the new will replace the old, the generous will replace the mean and that God's Way was fermenting, like the best fine wine.

'Do whatever he tells you'. The servants, by doing the seemingly small action of filling water jars, at the right time, were joining in with miracle-making. They were unaware they had done anything, except what Jesus had asked them to do. This is how it works for us too. We do a small thing when Jesus asks and then we must leave the rest to the Living Lord of Life.

And Mary? She was not only speaking to the servants. We can hear her voice echoing down the centuries. 'Do whatever he tells you'. I wonder, what has Jesus asked you to do? Jesus, like his Abba, Father, is a gentleman. He won't invite you to do anything you can't do. His promise is that you will be given the strength you need. Last week, Jonathan took on the role and responsibility of becoming Chair of Trustees for Portsmouth Diocese's Council for Social Responsibility. Felicity initiated a link between Botley School and our Churches to grow a Prayer Tree for the Village to see. When they, and the rest of us working for the Kingdom of God here in Durley, Curdridge and Botley, ask for your support, I wonder, what will you **do**?

Let us pray...

God of Liberation, confronting the powers that exclude the unclean and bind us to death: may we receive your word of authority, your rule of peace, your earthly holiness which come to set us free, through Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God.  
Amen