

Water and Wine

Third Sunday of Epiphany in Year B of Mark

Genesis 14:7-20

Psalm 128

Revelation 19:6-10

John 2:1-11

If I were to be offered the chance to direct the film version of the turning of water into wine, I would cast Maureen Lipman as Jesus' mother. She would have just the right way of playing a determined matriarchal figure: they are at a wedding together – and Jesus has all his mates there. Clearly there has been some mess-up with the caterers – perhaps they'd outsourced it to Carillion. And so Mary digs her son in the ribs in a significant kind of way.

The wine's run out!

You can see the expression on her face; the meaningful raising of the eyebrows as if to say 'now's your chance!' Jesus ignores the hint:

'Its nothing to do with me, mother'

he mutters in an embarrassed way. She's showing him up before his friends. But Mary will have none of this. She won't take a 'no' from her little boy. And so she calls one of waiters over

'Speak to my son. He'll sort it!'

There is no doubt that John has a wonderful down to earth way of telling stories. But John is not a jovial raconteur. He does not repeat this story simply because it happened. John's gospel is very carefully planned with a very definite purpose. In fact he spells it out at the end of his gospel:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

John 20:30-31

John records seven events that he calls 'signs', central to this key message that Jesus is the Messiah. These are

- The turning of water into wine
- The healing of an official's children 4:46
- The healing of a lame man by the Pool at Bethzatha
- The feeding of the five thousand
- The calming of the storm on the Sea of Galilee
- The healing of a man born blind
- The raising of Lazarus

In the first miracle at Cana, Jesus picks up two images of God that are constant throughout the scriptures: marriage and wine. The image of marriage appears like this in Ezekiel:

I passed by you again and looked on you; you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you, and covered your nakedness: I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became mine.

Ez 16:8

It is also found in Isaiah, Joel and Hosea, often with words of reproach to a nation which has been unfaithful to God. Above all it appears in Song of Songs, a book of poetry which can be read entirely on a human, natural level or on a spiritual level. The idea that God and his people were husband and wife was commonplace in the time of Jesus. And it continues in the New Testament writers. The writer of Revelation uses the image in a visionary way to describe the end of time:

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.
Rev 21:2

Paul uses the image in a more prosaic and down to earth way:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might

