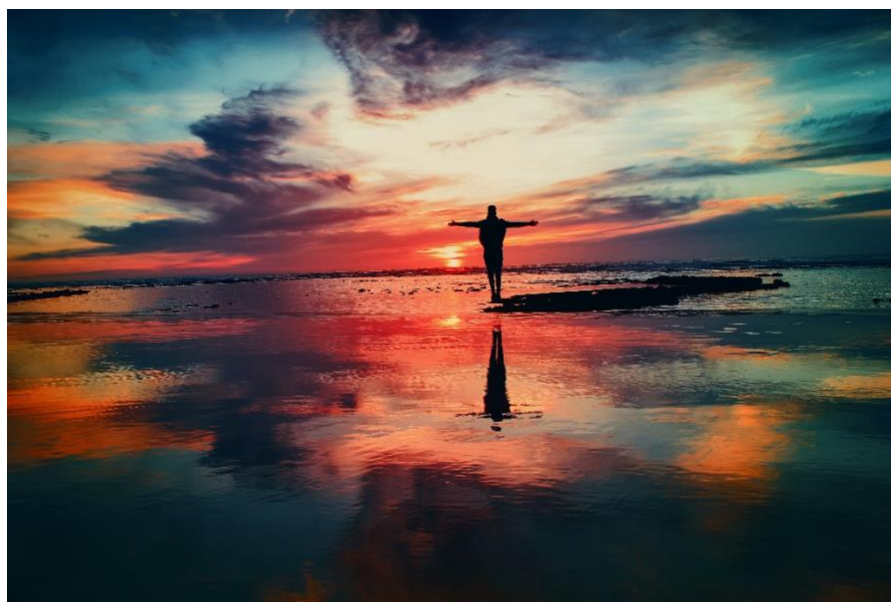


Sermon on Sunday 21 January by Melanie Seward, Lay Reader

Readings: Revelation 19:6-10 and John 2:1-11



The 'Real Thing'

You may recall, or have seen on YouTube, the adverts for Coco Cola; we were told that this drink, that can corrode metal coins, is the 'real thing'. In other words, forget about all the other drinks on offer, what you really need to make your life feel good is to drink a bottle of Coke – you will be refreshed, look cool and life for a few minutes will feel sweet.

The miracle of Cana is the first of seven signs or signposts to Jesus that John uses in his Gospel. Each has a message. The miracle reveals God's glory by showing us that Jesus is the incarnation (God made man) who changes everything. It's a type of theophany – an event that somehow reveals to humanity something about what God really is. In other

words, it provides an insight into how Jesus is the 'real thing' or the 'real deal'. And it is, definitely, not an advertisement.

For a start, when we read the account, we can see that Jesus doesn't go the Wedding to perform a miracle. He has not chosen to attend a big, flashy, status-enhancing occasion where he can create a scene so that everybody looks at him and says, 'Wow, this is a great miracle! It's a far better performance than any other teacher or holy man'. No, the Derren Brown or Dynamo effect is not what Jesus is hoping to generate.

Jesus is at an ordinary wedding; so ordinary that the family runs out of wine. It's a social embarrassment that anyone would try and avoid by making sure they had access to plenty more, IF they had the money to do so. Secondly, when Mary his mother notices, he doesn't immediately leap up; he needs a little persuasion. He acts NOT as a benefactor bestowing material wealth, but out of compassion for the family who cannot provide their community with enough, in order to celebrate marriage as required by custom. Only the workers, not the guests, really know what is happening when Jesus tells them to fill the jars with water and then instructs them to draw what is wine to serve to the guests.

The stone jars used for ritual washing – purification rites – would each have held many gallons. Jesus produces far more wine than would be needed. His generosity of provision and the quality of what is provided outweighs what has been on offer previously (the chief steward is amazed that the best wine has been saved until last).

Finally, we need to understand that these jars will not be used again for ritual washing in accordance with the Jewish

law. The wine will be seen as making them unclean, but the inference is far more than this. They will not be needed. For Jesus is bringing in a new Kingdom where new life is available by living out faith in him and through him. This is the new wine that will transform and transcend the old ways. Instead of using rules, laws and customs to try to keep on the right path, Faith and Love in Jesus Christ will keep our pathway to God. It will be a different way of living; we will be changed and the world itself will be transformed.

The Jews at the time of Jesus were aware of the idea that God's plan for the world would come to fruition through him sending a messiah, a chosen one, who would lead his people and inaugurate a new reign on earth. The celebration banquet was known and used as an image of the kingdom to come. Christians saw Jesus the Messiah as bringing in a new kingdom – a new kind of living – and who, as Messiah in Glory, would return to bring the kingdom or new world to completion.

In the book of Revelation, we have a vision of this. At the centre is the image of the wedding supper of the lamb who is the Risen and triumphant Christ, the same Christ who suffered death on the cross. The vision is of the future; it's a vision of Jesus in unity with all the faithful – some would say with all humanity; it is the completion of God redeeming work. This is the power of God's Glory through the light and the love of His son.

The author of John's Gospel is saying to us, look at Jesus at the Wedding at Cana, it's all there. See the power and the glory, the light and the love. It's more than a wedding; it's showing us how God, through Jesus, can change us. The vision of Revelation is saying that Jesus offers more than an invitation to a future feast where we will worship God in a

new world in total unity, community, peace and faith. The vision of the Supper of the Lamb is an invitation to take our seats now. It's not just a future event to look forward to. It is a call to live our lives today.

Many of you will have heard or read Geoff's sermon on Epiphany. The Wise Men see God's Son, God made manifest in the baby, Jesus. The Wise men are not the same, they do not go back the same way; they are changed. Hear the message of Epiphany; look at this Jesus and step into change. Read about the life of Jesus, step by step try to follow his footsteps and with God's help take on the values of the new kingdom. Let's be guided by light and love in the way we celebrate and the way we struggle, in the way we work and the way we rest, in the way we love and the way we forgive and begin again. Let us choose to turn from evil and hatred and be part of, and look forward to, a transformed life. Let's choose the real thing and enter the real deal.