

Sunday 6th January 2019. Gospel Reading: John 2:1-11.

The Wedding at Cana. (634 words)

(One of three mini sermons i.e. the 'Wise Men', the 'Baptism of Christ' and the 'Wedding at Cana')

John's gospel has a spiritual and mystical dimension that distinguishes it from Matthew, Mark and Luke; it is full of symbolism, allegory and metaphor, and has a depth of meaning that would be completely missed if we simply focused on the literal details. Walter Hilton, the fourteenth century English mystic, contrasts superficial knowledge with deep experiential and transcendent awareness. He explains that *'knowledge is like water, tasteless and cold. But if those who have it will offer it humbly to our Lord...he will turn the water into wine...he will turn...savourless knowledge into wisdom, and cold naked reason into spiritual light...'*¹ In this season of Epiphany, which can mean *'to bring to light'*², if we get lost in the 'savourless' details of the gospels, which are just a means to an end, we can fail to see the bigger picture, we can miss the 'spiritual light'.

Ravi Ravindra, a former professor of comparative religion, explains that *'the teaching of Jesus Christ exists...to show mankind a way of transformation of being so that one may live not self-centred, as one does, but God-centred'*³. The wedding at Cana is one such teaching; it is an allegory based on the reality of a different, God-centred, dimension to life. It's an illustration that our lives can be transformed into God-centred lives. The first thing to note is the context of the story. We are transported into the Galilean village of Cana and into the heart of a marriage ceremony. Marriage, of course, is the union of two people; in marriage, two become one, and here marriage is used

¹ Walter Hilton, *the 'Ladder of Perfection'*

² Gross, B. (2009) *Living the Christian Year: Time to Inhabit the Story of God*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press.

³ Ravi Ravindra, *'Christ the Yogi: A Hindu Reflection on The Gospel of John'*

metaphorically as an image which visually symbolises the union of the human and the divine, the marriage of the soul with God. Subsequently, the transformation that Jesus brings about for the water, alludes to the transformation that God, as exemplified in the life and teaching of Jesus, can bring about in us; the transformation of our lives, our reality, our very being. If we journey on this path of inner transformation, to the place of union with God, we might hope to say, as Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians, that *“we have the mind of Christ”*⁴.

Whilst for some, like Paul perhaps, this transformation may come about suddenly through the grace of God, for most of us this is something that we have to work at with God and in God. It involves a willingness to open ourselves to change, it is a life’s work of patient practice. But, as John explains later in his gospel, Jesus said *“I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly”*⁵. Not just a bland life, but abundant life, a life that is rich, boundless and liberated. If we respond to Mary’s direction and do whatever Jesus tells us, if we participate in the work that he exemplified, we can be transformed as the water is transformed. We can move beyond our bland lives of water and, like the stone water-jars, we can become filled to the brim with the sweet, fruitful and abundant life of good wine. We can move beyond ‘savourless knowledge’, beyond ‘cold naked reason’ and know, with a deep experiential awareness, that our lives are filled to the brim with ‘spiritual light’. In the story of the wedding at Cana, we are shown that through Jesus, the *‘water of man’* can be transformed *‘into the wine of God’*⁶.

Amen.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:16 (NRSV)

⁵ John 10:10 (NRSV)

⁶ Davidson, J. (1995) *The Gospel of Jesus: In Search of His Original Teachings*. Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element Books Limited.