

St Augustine and St Mary's: Reflection and Prayers offered this week by Karen.

Sunday 24th January The Third Sunday of Epiphany.

Collect

*God of all mercy
your Son proclaimed good news to the poor,
release to the captives,
and freedom to the oppressed :
anoint us with your Holy Spirit
and set all your people free to praise you
in Christ our Lord.*

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

This time last year I was in Edinburgh, it was our daughters 21st birthday and we had a big party !! Lots of family and friends, gathered in a quirky venue, there was music and dancing, laughter and conversation, food and drink, catching up with old friends and meeting new ones, hearing and telling stories. All the elements of a good party – and how we all miss not being able to gather in that way at the moment.

The Gospel reading for this week is set in a party – at a Wedding Feast to be precise, and the theme of celebration and feasting and of wedding banquets run through all of today's readings – do make some time to read them all !

Jesus turns water into wine, and in so doing ensures that this particular wedding is not remembered for all the wrong reasons, and that the honour and reputation of the host remains untarnished. Presumably, gathered at this wedding celebration was the community of family and friends that Jesus had lived and grown up amongst, of course he would have wanted the big day to go well and he acts out of compassion.

However as with so many of the miracles and "signs," far greater eternal truths are signalled and revealed in the miraculous actions of Jesus. Here, God in Jesus is revealed as nature obeys, Jesus is the power of God over the elements of the world. Much of modern humankind would like to think it has control over most of life– but the forces of nature and this pandemic serve to remind us all that there is much beyond our control. In times of uncertainty and powerlessness we cling on to the eternal truths - God is with us in these times, God knows all things, holds all things and sustains all life – but what this truly means is mostly beyond our understanding.

This miracle also points us to eternal truth about the coming of the kingdom of God, that kingdom is both now and not yet, in this miracle Jesus is revealed as God- Lord over all creation, a very present reality, and yet it is also a foretaste of what is to come, the heavenly banquet of all eternity. In the imagery of Revelation, and other New Testament writings, the heavenly kingdom is depicted as a wedding banquet – and we, the church, are described as both guests at that banquet and as the bride. It is a picture of abundance and of glorious celebration. So as we read of this miracle at a wedding in Cana in Galilee, John is pointing us to bigger things, to eternal truths.

I wonder when you feel you may have experienced a glimpse of kingdom of heaven in all its fulness – perhaps at a party or celebration; gathered with many others in worship; in the raucous celebration or a football crowd; in the joy of being reunited with people you haven't seen in a long time; in the calm of a walk or the peace of a candle light; bathing in sunshine – all these and many more might offer us a glimpse of eternity, where we are “lost in wonder love and praise” or caught up in joy or peace.

Generous hospitality, great joy and shared worship are markers of the wedding feast of the kingdom of God – we pray “ your kingdom come on earth...” and although opportunities for those things might be limited for us at the present time, what are the challenges for us as congregations, as the people of God, as we seek to allow the kingdom of God to come more fully into our lives and communities ? How do we embody and live out the generous hospitality, great joy and shared worship of the kingdom.

Whatever we do it will be grounded in the simplest of things, just as it was for Abram and Melchizedek in our Genesis reading - taking ordinary bread and wine, giving thanks, sharing, being blessed by God and one another and going out having been reminded of the eternal truths, that we are created, known, loved, held and redeemed.

In this time of lockdown, when Eucharist and parties and sharing life and celebrating together are not possible how can we keep ourselves well – there are some very practical things, finding a routine for each day, setting aside a regular time to pray, being thankful for something each day, planning something to look forward to – a walk with a friend, a nice meal or sweet treat , a new book, a phone call and by clinging on to the eternal truths that all things are created and known and loved and held within the love of God beyond our understanding – yet revealed to us in Jesus.

The trumpets sound, the angels sing
The feast is ready to begin
The gates of heaven are open wide
And Jesus welcomes you inside

Tables are laden with good things
O taste the peace and joy he brings
He'll fill you up with love divine
He'll turn your water into wine

*Sing with thankfulness songs of pure delight
Come and revel in heaven's love and light
Take your place at the table of the King
The feast is ready to begin
The feast is ready to begin*

The hungry heart he satisfies
Offers the poor his paradise
Now hear all heaven and earth applaud
The amazing goodness of the Lord

*Graham Kendrick
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We have decided to close for public worship until it is safe to resume. Weekly reflective sheets will be sent out and there will be a zoom service at 10.30am on Sunday mornings.

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