

SERMON AT YORK: 18/1/98: GEOFF CHADWICK: SECOND SUNDAY

AFTER EPIPHANY: Jn2:1-11

"W(H)INING"

The first miracle of Jesus (according to Jn) at the wedding at Cana is very famous. Turning water into wine is a really good party trick. Jesus is able to turn whining (that is, complaining) into wining (that is, celebration).

Can you imagine the whining going on? In a culture where hospitality is everything and to run out of provisions at a wedding is a family disgrace, the wedding host would have been beside themselves. Imagine the whining:

"I thought you ordered the extra barrel of Rosé!"

"No I thought you were going to!"

"Well it's your fault anyway - I always thought your family were a bunch of wine swilling gluttons!"

"My family! Look at yours! Your uncle Zachy over there looks like he's had more than all of my family put together!"

"Rations! Rations - yes that's what we will have to do. No one will be allowed more than two standard drinks from now on!"

"Why don't we try watering the wine down? I mean if we only do it a bit no one will notice - will they???"

"What about Rabbi Zimmerman's cellar. Don't you think he'll let us have some of his supplies? Oh that's right he said they were Corban - given to God or something - I don't know - what are we going to do?"

I think there might have been a lot of whining going on.

Now Jesus' mother enters the scene and forces Jesus' hand. Despite his protestations Jesus (like all good and obedient Sons at a party) does what his mother tells him. He

changes 180 gallons of water into wine. This is equivalent to about 600 litres. Just ponder this amount for a moment. 600 litres. That's equivalent to 800 standard sized bottles of wine!

Jesus had turned their whining into wining!

No doubt the party continued on with great gusto. Disgrace was avoided, and celebration was ensured.

There is more to this story than meets the palate. There is a symbolic aspect to the story as well. The symbols are these:

The wedding feast - represents the banquet God prepares for all in heaven.

The stone jars of water for purification - represent the old law.

Wine - is the ancient symbol of celebration and joy.

Changing the water into wine - represents the change that is to come with the new covenant.

The changing of the water into wine is not just a story for party animals. It is a story about change. It is a story about life. It is a story about a celebratory God.

Change and life: The Jesus we meet in this story brings about change. The water changes to wine. More than that- the wine is so good that the stewards remark: "... But you have kept the good wine until now" (Jn2:10, NRSV). This is the Jesus who turns whining into wining. This is the Jesus who turns disaster into joy. Ah! There are shade of the resurrection here - disaster is turned into joy. This is the new covenant. This old stone-encased ways of knowing God by keeping the letter of the law have given way to the fruity aroma of a freely flowing new way of knowing God. New wine is new life. New wine is new joy and new wine is new hope - these are the things Jesus and the new covenant stand for.

Nevertheless I wonder if we really believe this. Do we really believe in joy after disaster? When we encounter Jesus, is our whining turned into wining? As Christians, people touched by Christ, are we whiners (complainers) or winers (people who celebrate)?

Maybe it's a bit of both. Our winging, our dissatisfaction with the world, our bickering, our inability to believe in others, etc... easily empty our cup of joy. In this life, through sin, we know too often the experience of having our wine turned into water. Nevertheless, we have to believe in our wine maker. We have to hold on to the realisation that Jesus, by invitation, is able to imbibe the flagging party of our lives with the ferment of joy.

A Celebratory God: One of the consistent images we have of heaven in the bible is that of a wedding feast. It seems that feasting and laughter and all those other things we associate with a good feast are hallmarks of the God of heaven. But do we really believe this - or more importantly does the general population believe this?

The other day I was talking insurance with the builder who was doing some work on a church. At one point we joked and he said to me: "Does your Church's insurance policy cover you for acts of God"!

It was a great joke, but does it reveal some general belief in a God of disaster. Our God is not a God of disaster. Sure our God is a God who knows the pain of disaster, but our "acts of God" include winemaking, feasting, and celebrating. Our God is a God of wining.

The only "acts of God" our insurance policy should cover us for are those events where his worshippers become so joyous that we have people trying to wipe the smiles off our faces.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.