

17 January 2010 Rev'd Jeannette McHugh

Jesus at a wedding in Cana

John 2: 1-11

Every Christmas day we have the reading from the beginning of John's gospel -

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Wonderful, mysterious words to describe God and the beginning of time. Deep, deep words.

It is a well known saying that John's gospel is deep enough for elephants to swim in, and shallow enough for toddlers to splash in.

I think that given that it is January, our holiday month, and it has been very hot this past week, that we should today be content to be toddlers at the beach.

So let us see what there is for us toddlers in our gospel reading today.

Our reading is the first eleven verses of the second chapter of John.

Being toddlers let us go over what has happened up till now.

In chapter one we have those great words about God and the Word and the amazing statement that as no-one has seen God, because Jesus is close to the Father's heart, he makes God known to us.

Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist and is given the titles:

Lamb of God, Son of God, Rabbi, the Messiah, which means the anointed one, and King of Israel.

Jesus has chosen a third of his disciples: Andrew, Simon, who he renames Peter, Philip, our 'come and see' Philip, and Nathaniel.

I will own up to a new learning experience this morning! Looking over this address I suddenly thought - was Nathaniel a disciple? I couldn't think of any St Nathaniel churches!

I had to check it out and found that it is believed that St Nathaniel somehow or other becomes St Bartholomew. I had heard of St Bartholomew churches!!

As well Jesus has just slightly boasted to Nathaniel when he tells him to not be too impressed that Jesus knew he were sitting under a fig tree, because'

very truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man'
i.e. 'me'

No-one can accuse the writer of John's gospel of having a slow leisurely introduction!

Now to our reading.

It's a wedding in Cana of Galilee—only written about in John's gospel. **and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited.**

The wine gave out – presumably much too early! Now listen again to the delightful exchange between Jesus and his mother. Have you not heard a similar conversation before?

Have you not been in one before, as father or mother, aunt or uncle, or child?

Mary: **They have no wine.**

Jesus: **Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.** i.e. I can't do anything yet.

I'm not ready to do miracles.

Mary, completely ignoring Jesus' response says to the servants:

Do whatever he tells you.

Jesus giving up says to the servants:

Fill the jars with water.

They fill them up to the brim and then he says:

Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward. They do.

The steward, not knowing what has happened says to the bridegroom:

Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.

That's it. John ends the story, with the words -

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Then follows a linking sentence:

After this he went down, to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples, and they remained there a few days.

So Jesus had a few days off before he gets angry with the sellers in the temple.

We are still paddling.

Is there something here for us?

I say yes.

I think it's found in the final words **and his disciples believed in him.**

If we remain toddlers and take the story as it is, and not look for esoteric meanings or wonder if it really happened, and so not wade in too deep as is the proper role of scholars and commentators, then what we have is an example of our God being gracious to us.

Our God helping us to believe in him.

Just as the signs or miracles of Jesus gave his disciples confidence that he really was 'the one,' so a simple story like this one can help us at certain times in our lives to hang on to our faith, or if we have moved away from our faith tradition, to find strength and peace and confidence from the Word of God again.

Let me explain from a personal example: Nearly 30 years ago I went through a time of great personal distress & loss

None of the great promises of comfort and help found in the bible worked for me. The lord might have been my shepherd, but I did want.

God might have been all powerful and loving but he had not helped me, nor prevented something happening which came close to destroying me.

He did not intervene.

Just as it would seem that God does not intervene in times of famine or war or tsunamis.

People of intelligence and good will might intervene, but the creator of the world does not. Our loving, all powerful God did not stop the earthquake in Haiti, he did not move it to a safe place where there were no people. He did not save this man's child from dying. (Show front page of The Canberra Times.)

It seems like he did nothing.

This is a very hard truth, but it is a reality which I am sure that most of us, if not all of us, have at some time in our lives experienced.

The times when we cannot find comfort from our spiritual faith, using that word in its original meaning of support and strength, for the hard times in our life.

I remember the time in the country when I had to take the funeral of a child of about 15 months who had been accidentally run over by his father at the back door of their house.

When I came to the house the grief was so intense that all I could do was silently embrace the mother and father and then sat down in silence with the family and stay there until someone else spoke.

I had no word of spiritual comfort for them.

And there was nothing for me at my time of loss.

But one night in the early hours, I woke and in exasperation thought 'there has to be something for me in the bible.' I found my bible and let the pages open by chance and it was the passage in Mark when Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane and the disciples could not stay awake as they waited for him. (Mk14:32-42)

He comes back three times and each time he is upset because they have fallen asleep. It was such a human and humorous story that it had the ring of truth about it.

What writer in their right mind would have made this up when Jesus was praying for strength to deal with the day when his death would redeem all humankind for ever and give all people throughout all time eternal life?

Those verses were enough to restore my confidence that it was worth while to go wading into the deeper depths of the Christian faith.

So I invite you in the hard times to be gentle with yourselves, and if the great texts from the bible bring you no comfort, then let us look for strength and peace in nature, in our garden, in our friendships, in the support of our families and those we love. Go to the movies, read poetry, watch TV, do whatever it takes to 'keep you going', but at the same time, let us

keep open the possibility that the words of our spiritual tradition will speak again to you and me, even if, at first, it is only through a mother taking absolutely no notice of her son's protests about not being ready to be on show.

This is what real mothers do!!

So try to find words that have the ring of truth about them and go on from there.

Finally, let us today believe that this wedding story was deliberately put at the beginning of John's gospel to help us believe in the divinity of Jesus, and to give us confidence to wade into the deeper waters of our faith.

It is indeed God being gracious to us, by making it easier to believe in Him because we are little,
and it is hot,
and we are tired
and hungry
and thirsty.

Amen.