

SERMON PREACHED AT SJH EPIPHANY 2 WEEK 2 YEAR C 16 JANUARY 2022

Less than two weeks ago we celebrated the Feast of Epiphany. Epiphany means ‘showing, revealing, manifesting,’ That feast focuses on Jesus being revealed to the Gentiles, represented by the magi from lands afar. The Sundays after Epiphany continue this theme. Last Sunday, the Feast of the Baptism of Christ, we heard how Jesus was baptised, the Holy Spirit descended on him, and God’s voice revealed that Jesus was his beloved Son. Today we heard how by changing water into wine Jesus reveals his glory, and his disciples believe in him.

This miracle, or ‘sign’ as S. John calls such acts in his gospel, is full of meaning. It’s not just Jesus coming to the rescue of a tricky situation. The first thing to observe is that it occurs very early in Jesus’ ministry – we’re no further than chapter 2 of the gospel. We’re told that the six stone water jars were for the Jewish rites of purification. Jesus puts them to a new use as containers for the wine into which he has transformed water. He is bringing something new – springing out of the Jewish world into which he was born, but going beyond it, transforming it. The newness, the difference from what has gone before, will be the subject of many of the arguments with the Pharisees and others recorded later in the gospel. And at the end of his ministry, at the last supper, Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment, and describes the cup as the new covenant in his blood.

Now Jesus is not calling us to change the religion we claim to practise. But we can ask what difference our Christian faith has made in our lives. Is it something that affects what we do? Is the love of Christ the context in which we set our other relationships? Is our participation in the Christian community more than just being out of the house for an hour on a Sunday morning, or time spent watching a livestream of a church service? Do we find a richness in following Jesus – the abundant wine of the kingdom compared to the water of a life in which he is not present?

The second thing to observe is another connection between the wedding at Cana and the end of Jesus’ life on earth. The link is Jesus’ mother and the strange dialogue between them. In John’s gospel there are two key figures who aren’t named: Jesus’ mother and the beloved disciple: the two figures each side of Jesus on the rood here in church. Jesus’ words to his mother at the wedding are short and, on the surface, ambiguous. They are literally, “What to me and to you, woman? My hour has not yet come.”

S. John begins his account of the last supper with the words ‘Jesus knew that his hour had come.’ It’s not just 60 minutes of course. His ‘hour’ includes his suffering, death and resurrection. And during those world-transforming events, Jesus gives his mother a rôle to play. He makes her mother of the beloved disciple: “Woman, behold your son.” It’s newness again. A new family is created: the Christian community. The beloved disciple, the one closest to Jesus, is the model for all followers of Jesus, so it is our family. This suggests another link with the Cana wedding, because marriage creates a new family. Yet another link is the blood and water that flows from Jesus’ side when he is pierced by a lance; he had said over the cup of wine, “This is my blood.”

So today’s gospel speaks to us of the new way of life that Jesus gives to his followers. The community they form, the church, is founded on the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. These events, which Jesus shares with us, are more fundamental to our existence as Christians than following his ethical teaching in an attempt ‘to be good.’ Anyone can do that, and I hope they do. But as we concentrate on our fundamental identity as members of his family, I pray that he will work miracles in our lives, and that we will become signs pointing others towards him.