

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 7th March 2021

Exodus 20.1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1.18-25; John 2.13-22

In the Gospel of John chapter two, Jesus plays good cop and bad cop. First we have the wedding at Cana, where Jesus turns water into wine, and of course everyone thinks that this is really great. More booze can't be bad. The sign is full of promise about a new kind of faith in God bringing new life and new hope. But then Jesus goes and does something else quite different, as we heard this morning. And in this he is saying, and this..... is what it really means. I am going to teach you to rethink entirely the way you celebrate your faith in God. It's a spiritual revolution.

And so, soon after the wedding at Cana in St John's gospel, Jesus travels to Jerusalem in order to mount a symbolic protest in the temple, the cathedral of Judaism at the time. Moreover he is doing this in the run up to a major festival, so he wants to be noticed. However the authorities seem to have taken it in their stride. OK so what does this mean for you, they ask indulgently. And Jesus gives a cryptic answer they don't understand, can't possibly understand. So they shrug, go back to ignoring him, set up their tables again, and go and gather the scattered animals. What they don't get is that Jesus has just challenged the fundamental reason for the temple's very existence.

But for St John, the incident is indeed heavy with meaning. Unlike the cleansing of the temple in the other gospels, where Jesus calls the temple a den of thieves because it has become corrupt and dishonest and is ripping off the poor, Jesus' criticism here is more fundamental. He is attacking the very purpose of the temple. He sees it as an offensive market place in which people's relationship with God is bought and sold. He is attacking the whole sacrificial system in which people seek to buy their way back into God's good books by offering sacrifices.

Obviously the system was more nuanced than that, but what Jesus is telling us is that the transformed life that he revealed in the new wine at the wedding at Cana, is not just a matter of just tweaking our spiritual lives here and there. It's not just like an extra drink. Something much more fundamental in the way of change is going on, an needs to go on. And if you want to become open to that new life, then you need to be ready for that change.

So what is the essence of this change? It is that being spiritual is not primarily about what people do and say, or don't do or don't say. It isn't primarily about belonging or not belonging. It's isn't primarily about asking God for stuff. Though all these things can be part of it. It is about becoming more aware of what God has done and what God is doing, so that we may join in.

The key, as St Paul points out in our first reading today, is that Jesus is both the power of God and the wisdom of God. In other words, if you want to know what God is doing, if you want to know what God is saying, then pay attention to Jesus. But be ready; it will

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involve more change than you thought. But in Jesus you will find new life, new love and new hope. And just look out for the overturned tables on the way. Amen.

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