Circuit Written Service 19th January 2025 by Revd Steph Jenner

Psalm 36: 5 – 10

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,  
    your faithfulness to the clouds.  
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,  
    your judgements are like the great deep;  
    you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!  
    All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.  
They feast on the abundance of your house,  
    and you give them drink from the river of your delights.  
For with you is the fountain of life;  
    in your light we see light.

O continue your steadfast love to those who know you,  
    and your salvation to the upright of heart!

Hymn StF 35

The trumpets sound, the angles 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.

*Sing with thankfulness…*

Graham Kendrick

Prayers of Praise and Confession

To approach our worship together, we offer our beliefs as prayer:

We believe in God the maker and shaper of our pathways; who sent Jesus to show us the narrow way, and who is the beginning and the end of our travelling

We believe in Jesus Christ the sharer of our flesh; who entered and experienced the human journey, and who walks beside us on the road.

We believe in the Holy Spirit the midwife and nurturer of our potential; who drove Jesus out into the desert, and who call us now to cast off from the shore.

We believe in Father, Son, and Spirit, the shaper, sharer, and stirrer of our journeys; and we recommit ourselves to following their Way. Amen.

God sends us messages; when we receive them, God makes our lives better, when we ignore them, we make our lives worse.

When our message says, ‘love others’ and we don’t – dear God, we’re sorry.

When our message says, ‘love yourselves’ and we don’t – dear God, we’re sorry.

When our message says, ‘love me’ and we don’t – dear God, we’re sorry.

Help us to love you.

Help us to know you love us.

Help us to share your love with others. Amen.

Lord’s Prayer – please pray whatever version or language you prefer

Introduction:

Our reading from John’s Gospel below is widely agreed upon as the first of Jesus’ miracles, but it almost seems a reluctant one, Jesus thinks he is not ready – God proves otherwise:

John 2: 1 – 11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, ‘Fill the jars with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, ‘Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.’ So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, ‘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.’ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Hymn StF 638

Through all the changing scenes of life,

in trouble and in joy,

the praises of my God shall still

my heart and tongue employ.

Of his deliverance I will boast,

till all that are distressed

from my example comfort take,

and charm their griefs to rest.

O magnify the Lord with me,

with me exalt his name;

when in distress to him I called,

he to my rescue came.

The hosts of God encamp around

the dwellings of the just;

deliverance he affords to all

who on his succour trust.

O make but trial of his love;

experience will decide

how blest are they, and only they,

who in his truth confide.

Fear him, you saints, and you will then

have nothing else to fear;

make you his service your delight,

your wants shall be his care.

Nahum Tate & Nicholas Brady

Reflection

Many years ago, I was looking at this reading, the wedding at Cana, a bit more closely and I came to a conclusion that made sense to me of how it all happened. Not the miracle itself, I cannot explain that, but the circumstances around it that lead it to happen in that place and amongst those people. You may or may not agree, but I share it with you now.

Jesus and his disciples are invited to a wedding in a neighbouring town, so, to my mind, this must be the wedding of someone they know, and know well, for not only Jesus, but an extra 12 men to be invited. We are firstly told that Mary, Jesus’s mother was there, so it is likely that the invitation for them all was because of her connection, not of any of the other disciples, although they may well have known the groom, or the bride. But Mary, it seems, is also well known to the household because it is she who, noticing that they wine had run out, called Jesus to do something about it and instructed the stewards to do as he told them.

Now it is highly unlikely that if Mary were purely an invited guest that this would be her concern, or that she would be in a position to do anything about it. Nor is it likely that if she tried to remedy the situation that the stewards, the servants and organisers of the wedding would do as she said if she had no authority in the party. But they readily do so, and the miracle is enabled. If this was indeed the first miracle of Jesus then it is unlikely that a wider group than his immediate family and the disciples would know of his capabilities and therefore ask him to do something about the wine situation. So, my conclusion is that this is the wedding of one of Jesus’ sisters or brothers. That, to me, makes sense of the people who were there and Mary’s seeming authority. As it is in Cana and not Nazareth, it is also more likely to be a sister, as the wedding would take place at the groom’s residence, hence the steward making the comment to him about the quality of the new wine.

With this thought, I love that the first miracle takes place by a big brother for his sister at her wedding, surreptitiously so as not to draw attention to himself, but to enable the celebration to go on and embarrassment to be averted. This gladdens my heart to think that Jesus encourages us to celebrate, with family and friends, to do all we can to help the celebration to continue, however reluctantly. Before we get to the healings, and feeding the hungry, and instructions and commandments; before the Pharisees and Sadducees get involved, before the Passion and Crucifixion of Jesus, we start with those closest to him, doing what normal families do, with the addition of a miracle. What a fantastic thought.

A drawing of a glass of wine

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Hymn StF 318

Christ, our King before creation,

life, before all life began,

crowned in deep humiliation

by your partners in God’s plan,

make us humble in believing,

and, believing, bold to pray:

‘Lord, forgive our self-deceiving,

come and reign in us today!’

Lord of time and Lord of history,

giving, when the world despairs,

faith to wrestle with the mystery

of a God who loves and cares,

make us humble in believing,

and, believing, bold to pray:

‘Lord, by grace beyond conceiving,

come and reign in us today!’

Word that ends our long debating,

life of God which sets us free,

through your body recreating

life as life is meant to be,

make us humble in believing,

and, believing, bold to pray:

‘Lord, in us your aim achieving,

come and reign in us today!’

Ivor H Jones

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Thank you, God, for small gestures,

for a shared meal, for an unexpected card in the post,

for an encouraging email, for music that touches the soul,

for a relaxing cuppa, for birds in flight, for flowers in bloom.

Thank you, God, that, when life gets overwhelming,

you send kindness through friend, stranger, and nature;

that when life feels like it’s swirling out of control,

you have held us in the palm of your hand. Amen.

‘That is no concern of mine’.

How quickly it comes to our lips, how easy to wash our hands of problems and continue in our own sweet way.

Loving God, answer the needs of the world, doing what is necessary to bring peace, justice, and eternal life for all. The world is your concern and ought to be ours and we look to you to help us bring change.

Where there is hatred: Strengthen us to pour your love.

Where there is hunger: Guide us to fill the food stores.

Where there is illness: Inspire us to bring health.

Where there is loneliness: Help us spread fellowship.

Where there is war: Challenge us to show your peace.

Change attitudes, change lives, change us.

May your concerns become our concerns,

may your ways be our ways,

and may our love reveal your glory. Amen.

Hymn StF 327

Jesus is King

and I will extol him,

give him the glory,

and honour his name;

he reigns on high,

enthroned in the heavens –

Word of the Father,

exalted for us.

We have a hope

that is steadfast and certain,

gone through the curtain

and touching the throne;

we have a priest

who is there interceding,

pouring his grace

on our lives day by day.

We come to him,

our Priest and Apostle,

clothed in his glory

and bearing his name,

laying our lives

with gladness before him –

filled with his Spirit

we worship the King:

‘O Holy One,

our hearts do adore you;

thrilled with your goodness

we give you our praise!’

Angels in light

with worship surround him,

Jesus, our Saviour,

for ever the same.

Wendy Churchi

Blessing

Bless us with courage to take new risks,

boldness to be adventurous, and faith to know your presence. Amen.