

Ulrich Noetzel – Sermon on January 18th 2009 (Epiphany 2)

Readings: Exodus 33.17b-23 and John 2.1-11

Imagine a wedding.

One of these big once in a lifetime events.

Meticulously planned.

Carefully prepared over two years.

Everything matching.

All at great expense.

Imagine a wedding...

The photographer has released the people after far too many group photos.

You have fought your way through the line up.

And the person in front of you gets the last glass of champagne.

Sorry. Not enough...

Imagine a wedding...

where they run out of food during the second course.

Imagine

that there is nothing left of the wedding cake but crumbs for you.

Unthinkable –

a wedding is a feast of plenty.

No expense spared.

And you just cannot run out of food or drink.

Because the amount of food and drink are part of the symbolism of a wedding.

It is what you expect.

It is what you wish and hope for the couple.

The wedding celebration is a sign of the good times to come.

Now imagine

God coming. God appearing on earth in all his glory.

How is it when he comes to us?

What do you expect?

What do we wish to see and experience when he comes?

We are now in the season of Epiphany:

God appearing, God showing up on Earth.

We heard one story from the Old Testament from the book of Exodus. Moses wants to see God in his glory.

But God says “You cannot see my face, for no-one may see me and live”.

Another story is Jesus’ appearance at the wedding at Cana... There he works his first miracle. And the people can see God’s glory.

This is rather different from Moses’ experience. Not only do we see the miracles that Jesus does, but moreover: in him we can see the face of God and it doesn’t kill us – on the contrary.

No wonder that at the end of this wedding feast we hear that his disciples are greatly impressed “And they put their faith in him”.

So let’s have a closer look at this wedding.

This wedding is full of symbolism.

It reminds us that the prophets likened the relationship of God and Israel to a marriage.

And is not one of the major pictures of the kingdom of God that of a wedding?

And wine is a necessary ingredient for any good party!

It is no coincidence that Jesus turns up at a wedding feast at the very beginning of his ministry.

When Mary asks her son to do something about the lack of wine he rebukes her with very harsh words. The translation in the New International Version is rather tame:

“Dear mother, why do you involve me?” – this is nowhere near to what Jesus really said. If we translate it from the Greek it sounds more like: “Woman, what have you and I in common?” or “Why do you bother me?” or, as in the King James Bible: “Woman, what have I to do with thee?”

In the Greek, Jesus uses exactly the same words as one evil spirit uses¹, when he has just been discovered and is about to be cast out by Jesus: “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?”

Jesus is also about to be discovered.

Revealed to the world... this is the nature of Epiphany.

Mary does not seem to be greatly disturbed by the manner of Jesus’ speaking. She instructs the servants at the wedding what they should do – and in doing so – I think – she also addresses us: “Do whatever he tells you!”

“Do whatever he tells you!” – she completely trusts her son to bring a solution to the embarrassing situation of the wedding without wine.

¹ In the first healing miracle of Mark’s gospel (Mk 1.24)!

Jesus doesn't disappoint his mother. It is interesting that he doesn't do anything. He just – almost casually – tells the attendants to fill the big water jars with water and then to take the water to the master of ceremonies.

He doesn't do anything. There is nothing visible.

Faith is required. Faith to follow Jesus commands. To do, what Mary had said: “Do whatever he tells you!”

Water changes into wine. This saved the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee. And everybody there could continue to celebrate.

The wedding could be celebrated as a proper wedding is celebrated: with plenty of food and wine.

Unfortunately, we were not guests at this wedding long ago. But we are guests at another celebration. Whenever we celebrate communion, wine becomes for us the blood of Christ. Not unlike what happened at Cana.

The wedding feast at Cana marks the beginning of something new.

We see that the water jars are no longer needed for purification. Water has given way to wine. God has appeared in his glory. The appearance of Jesus means that we do not need to keep the ritual laws to be near to God.

Six big water jars from stone are mentioned. They are not needed anymore for washing. Together they hold a huge amount of water, up to something like 700 litres – that would be a thousand bottles of wine!

On the third day in Cana, people could witness for the first time the greatness and generosity of God in Jesus. And God also had a face for us – We could see him in Jesus. No need to hide between rocks anymore.

A new era began with this first miracle.

Epiphany is the festival of God becoming visible among the people. God letting himself be known.

Jesus showing the greatness of his Father.

We need to see.

We need to taste and experience.

Mary may say: “Listen and do whatever he tells you”.

But in the end we need to see his glory and because of that we put our faith in him:

As it is said in the conclusion of today’s gospel reading:

“This the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.”

What can be *our role* in this process of making God visible? In the revelation of God’s glory?

What can we take to the wedding feast to offer?

Which bottle can we take to the party that Jesus himself invites us to?

Often, it is not much that we can offer. Our own wine is far from drinkable... It is like at the wedding:

“We have no wine” – this sentence out of today’s story rings true in our lives.

“We have no wine”,

Sometimes we may feel that we have nothing to give. That there is not enough.

Or that we are not good enough.

We may ask ourselves: How could anybody see God’s glory through our own lives?

“We have not got enough wine, Lord”.

But we mustn't feel dejected. The wedding feast of Cana shows us how God uses our lack of wine to his ends.

This story encourages us to trust in the transforming power of God.

Look at what you have. Maybe you are lacking in wine.



But there is plenty of water. Just open the tap, fill your jars with it.

We can pour out this water in the full knowledge that we have nothing else to offer but water.

Even if we haven't got anything to bring to the wedding feast, but our weaknesses and faults. We can take our desperation and frustration.

Even if we think, there is nothing in our lives through which God can be seen.

We can take the gifts that we got freely.

We can take our water.

And we can trust that He will change our water into wine.

That he will make something extraordinary, something great out of the little we can offer. That He will transform our insignificance into His glory.



So that the world will taste good wine, even better than the first one.

Amen.