



Sunday 21 January 2018 – Epiphany 3
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: The Book of Revelation 19: 6-10 & St John 2: 1-11
Given by the Rev'd Juliette Robilliard

The Gospel features the familiar family occasion of a wedding. After a ceremony, we have a certain expectation that it will be followed by a reception. In Cana of Galilee Christ's first public miracle is recorded, or should that be his second miracle? Christmas and its celebrations may seem far behind us as we gallop through January but let's not forget that first miracle, of God's incarnate Son, the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

Jesus' every miracle is a wonder: they are never gratuitous but given after prayerful preparation. He turns the water into the most superlative wine but what is the significance of that? First, to spare the bridegroom embarrassment. Hosting a party providing the right amount of food and drink is a fine balance isn't it? A vast excess is flamboyant but all serving platters scraped cleaned to the last crumb is horribly stingy! Second the key point is that Jesus will not be hurried into action. When Jesus acts it is for more than a good idea it must also be a God idea. His response to Mary's observation may seem curt to our Western culture but she does not take umbrage. Mary ponders that her son will always take action in his own time, for every occasion when Jesus is present is a reason to celebrate. In giving of his divine nature, all want is fulfilled beyond compare.

Now, let's turn to the second marriage, the prophesy in the Book of Revelation of "...the marriage of the Lamb and his bride". The Lamb is Christ who gave his life, to redeem his people. The bride, is the Church or, in other words, all the faithful of each succeeding generation who represent God's living kingdom here on earth.

The mystical writings of John the Divine are not easy to understand, so a little context is always helpful. John was writing to seven churches in what is now modern-day Turkey, whilst he, himself, was exiled to the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. On Patmos he has ample time to ponder. So, is his writing merely fanciful, imagination? No! Although, his, book, is packed full of apocryphal, figurative, prophetic words, the style of writing would have been well understood by those seven churches.

For us, more than 2,000 years on in time, an immediate gasp of this style of writing is not intuitive. What then is significant about it? I think there are two key points: first, John draws deeply on the works of the Old Testament prophets, therefore, his writing is rooted in scripture; and second, it reflects the life and times of his day with instruction for his readers practical application.

John writes after the fall of Jerusalem. The Jewish rulers who had tried to cling to their position by appeasement now find themselves displaced by the Romans with ruthless abuse of power. The Christians, doubly persecuted for their faith first by the Jews and second by the Romans, have dispersed to neighbouring countries. Despite that they are growing in numbers but they need encouragement. John urges them not to be deflected by religious prejudice nor to succumb to the short-term lure of wealth and power. Rather, they are to be faithful and prepare for the long-term and Christ's second coming. Sadly, it is all too easy to be lured into the acquisition of material possessions by whatever means. Even in Guernsey, recently, the media headlines have reported some serious corrupt activities, the extent of

which is still being investigated. But, before I appear too moralistic, none of us is pure when compared with the spotless Lamb of God. Just as our eyes will spot a speck of dirt on a pure, white, linen cloth, a moral or spiritual blemish, no matter how small, is still a blemish.

With that background, let's now draw all of these thoughts together by asking a question. Will Christ come again as the Book of Revelation prophesies? I firmly believe so. How and when, Christ urges us not to spend time speculating. The key point of the second coming is who to expect and that's not Christ incarnate but Christ the Divine Lamb who comes to judge. All people will be held accountable for their use or abuse of power within their control. Or, as another writer puts it poetically:

*But every Herod dies, and comes alone
To stand before the Lamb upon the throne. **

Which is why, reflecting on my earlier comment it is a great mercy that Christ will not be hurried into action. He gives each succeeding generation time to transform. Although, John's writing predicts the imminent fall of the great pagan empire, we know that the Romans not only survive the 1st century after Christ but became Christian under Emperor Constantine. What, however, will that judgement be for Christ's bride, the Church? We are told "Let us rejoice!" Because she will have made herself ready, clothed in the fine, pure, linen of the righteous deeds of the saints. There is no contradiction in Christ the Divine Sacrificial Lamb on the throne also being the judge. The Lamb saves by his own shed blood, therefore, judgement will be merciful despite our imperfections, because God sees the intention of our hearts. To seek forgiveness and be forgiven, is the miracle of God's saving grace.

As the Church, what might God expect of us? We are to continue to establish his kingdom here on earth, as it is in heaven. To stand firm in faith for those who do not yet know God and help them to form a living relationship with him. Is what we do working? Well, here's a cheerful thought; the anonymous '*E Mauger*', so often given space in *The Press*, provides the Church with great publicity! For no one ever bothers to criticise something that's doing nothing. The more *E Mauger* writes, the more encouragement we have to keep calm and carry on! We can do so strong in the knowledge that the power and glory are God's, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Bibliography

Malcom Guite, *Sounding the Seasons*, Canterbury Press 2012