



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Sermon for Sunday, 24 January 2021
Looking back to look forward
Bible Readings: Genesis 14: 17-20 & St John 2:1-11
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

What's the reading from Genesis all about? The short extract introduces us to two key people, there's Abram (later to be known as Abraham) and Melchizedek. What possible relevance does the battle that has just taken place and the act of thanksgiving that follows, have for us today? We need to take a quick detour further back in Genesis to put everything into context.

Back to the future: Abram has taken on parental responsibility for his nephew Lot, since Lot's father had died. Together with their wives, servants and livestock they have, at God's behest, relocated from their ancestral territory near the River Euphrates travelling westwards towards the eastern Mediterranean kingdoms. Along the way both men have thrived owning extensive flocks of livestock, such that Abram senses the wisdom of him and Lot parting company to sustain their flocks in separate pastures. Abram gives Lot first choice. On comparing the lush pastures on the fertile plains below him rather than the rocky slopes on which they are standing, Lot bags the easy life only to learn the hard way later that greed is not next to godliness!

Family responsibilities: Meanwhile, the surrounding kingdoms under King Chedorlaomer form a cabal oppressing other nearby kingdoms. Unity does not last long and a rift occurs so that they end up fighting amongst themselves for supremacy. None of this would have affected peaceable Abram if Lot had not been taken hostage. Family always comes first with Abram believing it a gift from God. He steps into the fray and with extraordinary success routs the kings, capturing their booty including the people they had taken hostage.

Credit to whom credit is due: if we had read on Abram, though now endowed with fabulous wealth and power, has no intention of retaining what God in his mercy has enabled him to achieve other than to offer a 10th to Melchizedek, as a thanksgiving offering. He gives back to the kingdoms their own wealth bringing peace in the land. So, is this reading just about how to treasure ones' family and living peaceably with others? No: most peoples' natural instincts would be to do likewise irrespective of faith. We need to understand what the arrival of Melchizedek means in spiritual terms to then make sense of the Gospel recounting the wedding in Cana of Galilee and beyond.

Pointing forward: Melchizedek does not appear to have been party to the battle. He is described as a king in his own right, however unusually, he's also a priest: normally ruling and religion were led separately. In the kingdoms all around, various gods and religions would have been worshipped, therefore, Melchizedek's prayer of thanksgiving is extraordinary for the following reasons:

- **God of gods:** he prays not to a heathen god created by people but to God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth;
- **Bread and wine:** similar to Christian priests at a eucharist, he brings forward bread and wine in celebration of the salvation granted to the people;
- **Blessing:** as is the gift of priests, he blesses Abram.

In blessing, consecrating and giving thanks he associates Abram's God with the Lord God almighty: who was, and is and, is to come: incarnate in Christ the king, our great high priest. We with hindsight can make the connection.

Reflection: Part 2

More to the celebration than meets the eye: In Gospel we've joined Mary, Jesus and his disciples at the wedding in Cana of Galilee and the first of his miracles. We are informed that it is 'the third day', which, with hindsight, presages so much more to come. Calling Mary 'woman' instead of 'mum' may seem harsh to our modern ears, he also said 'My hour has not yet come'. By so doing he has gained his mother's undivided attention. Why? I think Jesus is in fact being compassionate preparing her for the stark revelation about to unfold between his human and divine nature. Mary may not understand him yet but she has pondered since the day he was born his different nature compared with other children: his gift of pursuing many things beyond our human ability and comprehension. She instructs the servants 'Do whatever he tells you'. It is wisdom to discern when another is more gifted in an area than oneself: to be humble enough to point people in their way that they too may grow in knowledge.

Compassion beyond measure: Jesus sees the social embarrassment of the wedding banquet running out of wine. To run out of provisions would imply that the guests do not deserve more. Jesus' miracle does something prodigious, the brimming water transforms into superlative wine. When Jesus provides there is enough for everyone beyond measure: God's grace knows no bounds.

Looking back to move forward: In the celebration after the battle, Melchizedek brought out measures of bread and wine. Jesus too, both at the wedding and later in his ministry, will use the ordinary to create the extraordinary. In blessing bread and wine Jesus will create a visual illustration to connect us to his body and blood. When his hour does come his abundant love will be all-outpouring: his life for the salvation of the whole world; his resurrection the guarantee that sin and death is conquered; his ascension our bridge, through faith, to heaven. What is our response to such abundant love?

When we meet again: At our next Eucharist, after lockdown has concluded, as we share the service together we will ask for God's forgiveness; we will come to the altar rail and bow the knee of our hearts in reverence for his gift of love; then, we will be sent out to love and serve him in the world. If, similar to Abram giving Melchizedek an offering in heartfelt thanks for salvation, we gave one tenth of the service of our hearts we might not change the whole world but we could, as the Body of Christ, change our part of it. Like Mary before us, let's ponder on these things.

Amen.