

The Parish of Bardsey with East Keswick

Sermon

Sunday 21 January 2024: Angela Hannafin

Good morning and welcome to Sunday's Sofa Sermon. We're in the season of Epiphany as part of Christmas, and today's reading is from the gospel of John:

¹ The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. ³ The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine." ⁴ "Dear woman, that's not our problem," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." ⁵ But his mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus told the servants, "Fill the jars with water." When the jars had been filled, ⁸ he said, "Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies." So the servants followed his instructions. ⁹ When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. ¹⁰ "A host always serves the best wine first," he said. "Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!"

¹¹ This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him".

I went to a wedding once, over thirty years ago, when the food and drink ran out. Admittedly, it was student friends who didn't have a lot of money, but it still created chaos when the buffet choices suddenly ended. I was at the end of the queue and did notice some slowing down and anxious conversations in the background. After some frantic running around, someone appeared with some Tesco carrier bags and – hey presto – more food was produced. It created some mirth and legend. In the ancient world, however, shame would have been created when not enough wine was available. So, Jesus' miracle also prevented the host from being blacklisted from the party circuit. We may remember this famous miracle, the first, John tells us, and so significant since it showed those reading the gospel that the Word, the living

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breath of God, was divine and able to do so much more than they could ever think or imagine. And as we still continue to celebrate the season of Christmas, it reminds us that we worship a holy God, a God of miracles. Miracles are not about saying hey presto by the way. Miracles are things which are thought to be impossible, but through faith in God, are made possible, with the greatest miracle of all being the central event of our faith, the resurrection. So even in the drabness of January, when all seems dead and grey, God can do miracles. The point is, are we able to see them?

The key person to this whole narrative is Mary, whose faith and spiritual awareness steers the action. Her phrase, 'Do whatever he tells you' allows the miracle of water to be turned into wine. Discipleship, following Jesus, is about listening to his voice and doing whatever he tells us. Sometimes that voice may be reminding us of a friend to call, or an email to write. That was my experience recently when I kept thinking of a friend, only to discover when I contacted her, that she'd been going through a rough time and needed my prayers.

Today's sermon takes place during the Week for Christian Unity, from 18th until 25th January. How does Christian Unity fit in with miracles you might ask. I think they both feature in the Venn diagram of this narrative. The diverse world of Christian worshippers today is different from the church of 2000 years ago, although the early Church would have had worshippers from a diverse background. Nowadays there are many expressions of Christian worship but they all come from the same God and, on the whole, have the same beliefs. Ecumenism, to give it its proper title, has always been important to me personally. In my family growing up, the four of us went to four different churches in the same town, basically because we all liked different ways of worshipping. Baptist, Free Church and Anglican – it meant there were diverse and interesting sermons to talk about too. It felt normal to me to join with those who worshipped in another way. Now I'm married to someone of a different tradition, and find his style of worship interesting and enriching to mine. But unity is not a nice-to-have. It's an expression of our discipleship and, like Mary says, if we do what he tells us, that means we need to be unified, because Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that all the disciples (and that includes us) would be one. Sadly, we don't always value unity or want to work at it, and as a member of the General Synod of the Church of England, I've seen that close up. However, we need to be unified and learn to disagree well. Unity is a sign of God working within us, it's a sign of our

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submission to God. We do what he tells us, and we work at our unity even when it's hard. Unity is also part of diversity, which the kingdom of God reflects. At the end of time, when Jesus comes again, there will be people from every tribe and nation gathered together. And in that glorious diversity, there will be unity.

Practically, what does this mean? If you're a member of our parish, then just a reminder that we're having a service at the Methodist Church next Sunday. I'd say don't consider that to be a 'Sunday Off' just because it's not your usual service or even church. Worshipping with other believers in a different context is good for us, it broadens our horizon and it increases our unity. It's a taste of heaven as we join together. Perhaps there is also a challenge to see God at work as we look at the whole of the gathered church. Where is God working his miracles amongst us, or amongst our brothers and sisters elsewhere? Jesus told his disciples that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and the ends of the earth. What he was describing were concentric circles going out from the place that they started at. I wonder if this isn't there a prompt from God to look out beyond our own places to other places where the Holy Spirit is moving? This can give us great encouragement as we look to those area where the church as a whole is growing. Across the world, China and Asia are experiencing great growth. Here in our own country, there is a great wave of Iranians coming to Christ, with Farsi-speaking communities growing up over the country where Iranians have found new life in Christ and for that we should give thanks and praise. Maybe your church could be a place for outsiders to come and find the Living Water of Christ and a be community that they could belong to? Isn't that a miracle you'd like to pray for? It is for me.

There is much going on in this world that can distract us from seeing God at work. Let's not let these things, difficult as they are, stop us from being witnesses of the miracles that God is doing even today. This week, let's ask God to show us where he is working all over his church, and let's ask him to make us part of that unity, the unity that Jesus tells us to strive to attain.
AMEN.