



ST JAMES AYR – SUNDAY REFLECTIONS



INTRODUCTION

A warm welcome to this week's Sunday Reflection where we will talk about Jesus' first miracle at the wedding of Cana.

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INTIMATIONS

23 Jan: Kirk Session

25 Jan: Prayer for Peace, Riverside 11am

26 Jan: Communion

Call to worship

The apostle Paul says:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15,13)

CHILDREN'S TALK

Hymn:

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Let us pray

Gracious God

We come together in this place as your church, as your children, bound together by the Holy Spirit, bound together by our faith and trust in your love. We come here with joy in our hearts because you are our God and we are yours.

Loving God,

You have been with us since our birth, you have walked with us to this very day, not for a minute did you leave us alone and in joy and in sorrow we can turn to you. That is reason for joy and gratitude and we thank you for your presence with us.

We offer our thanks today for your son Jesus Christ, who came to live among us as one of us, who showed us the abundance of your love and generosity by turning water into wine, who showed us what it means to be yours in good times and in challenging times.

We thank you for your Holy Spirit, through which we know you, through which we can feel your love in our hearts, through which we know the joy and the courage true faith can give and experience your steadfast love each day of our lives.

Forgiving God,

We confess today that we cannot always find the joy of faith in our hearts, when our worries and fears threaten to overwhelm us, when we feel helpless and discouraged. Help us to find a way to you in our joys and in our troubles, we pray.

We know we do not always live in you and follow you as the first apostles did. We get distracted by the ways of the world and we seek our joy not in you, but in material possessions. Help us to focus our whole lives on you, we ask.

Gracious Lord

We know that we are not perfect in your eyes, but we also know that you have justified us and made us righteous through your grace and through your son's life and death and in this trust we now pray as your son has taught us to pray.

Our father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be Thy name, thy kingdom come

Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread

and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors

and lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil

for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. AMEN

Hymn:

READINGS

Isaiah 62, 1-5

I will speak out to encourage Jerusalem; I will not be silent until she is saved, And her victory shines like a torch in the night. ²Jerusalem, the nations will see you victorious! All their kings will see your glory. You will be called by a new name, a name given by the Lord himself.

³You will be like a beautiful crown for the Lord. ⁴No longer will you be called "Forsaken," Or your land be called "The Deserted Wife." Your new name will be "God Is Pleased with Her." Your land will be called "Happily Married,"

Because the Lord is pleased with you

And will be like a husband to your land. ⁵Like a young man taking a virgin as his bride, He who formed you will marry you. As a groom is delighted with his bride, So your God will delight in you.

John 2, 1-11

Two days later there was a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ²and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine had given out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They are out of wine." ⁴"You must not tell me what to do," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." ⁵Jesus' mother then told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶The Jews have rules about ritual washing, and for this purpose six stone water jars were there, each one large enough to hold between twenty and thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, "Fill these jars with water." They filled them to the brim, ⁸and then he told them, "Now draw some water out and take it to the man in charge of the feast." They took him the water, ⁹which now had turned into wine, and he tasted it. He did not know where this wine had come from (but, of course, the servants who had drawn out the water knew); so he called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, "Everyone else serves the best wine first, and after the guests have drunk a lot, he serves the ordinary wine. But you have kept the best wine until now!" ¹¹Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

REFLECTION

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit

Loving God,

through your prophets and apostles, through your son you have promised never to forsake us, through your spirit you have shown us your love and encouraged us to bring your love to all your people. As we share this worship and listen to your word, we now pray that you are with us through your Holy Spirit to strengthen and to encourage us for our daily lives.

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Friends,

At our last coffee morning I had a conversation with some of you on how we save our photos on our phones and photo albums have gone out of fashion. It reminded me of the photo albums we have collected over the years of holidays and special moments in our family and I thought that while it is great that we always have the pictures of our loved ones at our fingertips, ready to show them round, it is also a shame that we hardly have those old fashioned albums any more, that we are depriving ourselves of the pleasure of pulling out old photos and reliving memories of good times. My husband and I have a very beautiful album with a wooden cover and our names inlaid in it. It was a wedding gift and therefore of course contains pictures of our wedding. I cannot with honesty say that it was the happiest day of my life – the worry about whether we had enough orders of service, a mislaid tiara (or rather a white flowery headband) and the last minute doubt if we really could seat Auntie Edda next to our Uncle Peter added some stress and hectic to an otherwise beautiful occasion, but it was definitely a good day, spent in the company of friends and relatives who were genuinely happy for us and many of them helped to make this day memorable.

A wedding is the ultimate symbol of love and joy, it has always been thus. And so it is not surprising that Jesus' first miracle is reported from a wedding. Given though, that most miracles throughout the gospel are healings, helping someone in dire need, someone desperate and worthy of our compassion, this story is extraordinary. It tells of a party, where the guests – if maybe not the couple – enjoy themselves and about the relatively minor inconvenience of running out of wine. And when his mother asks Jesus to help the couple out, he is at first reluctant. That is understandable: It does seem to be a rather trivial request, compared to the help he will offer to the outcasts and the desperate in later miracles. But the answer Jesus gives her is rather unexpected: "You must not tell me what to do," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." What does that mean? Can he not simply say yes or no? And Mary's reaction is also a bit strange: She tells the servants to do exactly as her son tells them, as if he had already agreed to help. As if she could not take no for an answer. That may indicate a certain stubbornness on her part, it also shows her trust in Jesus, the trust that he can and that he will help. That is essential. In showing this faith, this trust in her son, she acknowledges Jesus' authority. It is not just a matter of Jesus wanting to turn water into wine, Mary also believes, that he can. Not for a moment does she question either Jesus' power nor his special role. It foreshadows what people will later confess, what we still confess: that Jesus is the Messiah, our Lord, who has been given special authority by God.

What does Jesus mean though, when he says: "My time has not yet come." I think, we must see it in the light of this trust, this faith in him: We know, as Mary knows, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the one chosen by God. The wedding guests, including the couple do not yet know. If they did, they would hardly have been surprised, they would have known, what Jesus is capable of. As it is, they cannot explain what happened: Our reading states explicitly that the man responsible: "did not know where this wine had come from...; so he called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone else serves

the best wine first, and after the guests have drunk a lot, he serves the ordinary wine. But you have kept the best wine until now!”

It is “already”, but “not yet” at the same time: Jesus already shows what he can do, but the people around him – apart from his mother and presumably his disciples do not yet grasp what has happened. This story of an ordinary wedding is a symbol, a parable if you like, of something bigger. Most scholars say that it compares to God’s kingdom here on earth: Through Jesus, whom we know to be our Messiah and our Saviour, it has already come to us, we are already saved. But at the same time we know that life is still not a bed of roses, that there are still challenges, that there are pain and suffering both in our personal life and in the world. We all live with the tension of “already” but “not yet”. And here it is significant, that Jesus performs his first miracle at a wedding, a joyous, a happy occasion, a celebration of love and unity. It puts the focus firmly of the “already”, it shows us a glimpse of the joy of the kingdom of heaven here on earth. It is not completely there yet, to be sure, but we can still see it- in the joy and the love of a wedding. The theologian and poet Anneliese de Ruiz describes it beautifully in one of her songs: We have not arrived at the feast yet, but we are invited. We can already see the lights and hear the music. I think, that is a beautiful and apt image for God’s kingdom here on earth, for the “already” but “not yet”.

The prophet Isaiah in the beautiful poem that constitutes our Old Testament reading today also uses a wedding, or rather a marriage, as a symbol, the symbol of God’s love to his people, when he says: “You will be like a beautiful crown for the Lord. ⁴No longer will you be called “Forsaken,” Or your land be called “The Deserted Wife.” Your new name will be “God Is Pleased with Her.” Your land will be called “Happily Married,” Because the Lord is pleased with you” And will be like a husband to your land”. It is encouragement and comfort for Jerusalem at the same time. The prophet promises victory, and that means release from her plight. It means, that her people, God’s people will be free once more, able to breathe,

without fear. It also means, that God will be with them once more, that they will no longer be forsaken, that God will stand by them, delight in them even, as a groom delights in his bride, love them, as a husband loves his wife. And the prophet and his people live in the same tension between, “already here” and “not there yet”. The first verse of our reading: “I will speak out to encourage Jerusalem; I will not be silent until she is saved, And her victory shines like a torch in the night”, indicates that they are not out of the woods yet, that they are still in danger, and for the prophet’s people that will be a reality of life. At the same time they already know, that God is on their side, that God loves them and has claimed them for his own. And with that assurance, what can possibly go wrong. Once again, the prophet’s encouragement is not confined to Jerusalem any longer. It speaks to the whole of God’s people, who can already see his kingdom, but know that they are not there yet, that they are on a journey and that this journey contains challenges and obstacles. God’s love does not mean that life is easy, that there will never be problems to overcome, that we will never be hurt, it means, that when we are hurting, when we are faced with difficulties, even with difficulties that seem unsurmountable, God is there. He is, and always will be the God with us, the Immanuel. AMEN

AMEN

Hymn:

INTERCESSION

Loving God,

You have given us the joy and the encouragement of our faith, you have shown us your kingdom through your son Jesus Christ, a kingdom we can glimpse already here in this world. For this we thank

you and in giving thanks we also pray for all those for whom the kingdom of heaven is not visible here on earth.

We will never cease to pray for all who live in countries and regions of war and unrest in Ukraine, in Israel, Gaza and Lebanon, in Sudan and in Yemen and everywhere where weapons have not fallen silent. We pray for the widows, widowers and orphans, we pray for the injured on battlefields and behind the lines on all sides. May their longing for peace come true.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

We pray for all who are not free to practice their faith or voice their political opinion, for those who are imprisoned, because they advocate for human rights in Iran, in Afghanistan, in Russia and anywhere in the world. May they find justice and peace here on earth.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

We pray for all who feel left behind in this country and in this town, for all whose life has little joy to offer, for the poor and the marginalised, for the unemployed who have given up hope for a job, for those recently made redundant and struggling. Let them find new hope in you, we pray.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

We will always remember in our prayer those in our congregation and community who suffer, we think of all who are ill and frail in hospital or at home, we think of all who care for relatives and friends, for all who are housebound and for all who suffer silently and unseen. Grant them all your love, we pray.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

For all this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

We prepare for the dedication of the offering

Dedication

Loving God,

You have given us the joy and the hope of faith, you have enriched our lives through your son, who showed us your love through his miracles. For this we give you praise and thanks. And in gratitude for your love we bring before you some of what we have and we ask that you may bless these gifts, so they may bring your love to others.

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Hymn:

Benediction

And the God of love and joy guard you and guide you in this coming week. And the almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore. AMEN

