Epiphany 3B: Revelation 19: 6-10 & John 2: 1-11

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

So, this morning’s gospel tells that old familiar story of the wedding at Cana in Galilee. We have had, over the past few weeks, a succession of stories about beginnings, all sort of tumbling over each other in their rush to compete for our attention.

How and at what point does Jesus’ ministry begin? We move from Christmas, through the Epiphany, the coming of the wise men, through the baptism of Jesus to the calling of the first disciples. Last week we had the story of Nathanael under the fig tree, just after Jesus had called Philip to him. And now we have the wedding. So what is this all about?

I am struck by how Jesus is portrayed by John: Jesus is gathering around him a community of learning. A group of people who will accompany him in order to learn from him. If we think back to the first two disciples, there is that meeting on the road, when he asks them: What are you seeking? And they answer, oddly, with another question: Where are you staying? Or living? And he replies, also oddly, perhaps: Come and see. And they have that whole day of just being with him. Learning from him and about him, we surmise.

And then, what would be your first priority, having acquired a group of people who want you to be their teacher? Wouldn’t you gather them round, sit them down, maybe set out a few ground rules – this is how it’s going to work and this is what I expect of you, that sort of thing? Not Jesus. None of what was called, in my teaching days, chalk and talk. Or death by PowerPoint. The first thing Jesus does is take them to a party, to this wedding.

And in an extraordinary way, it is this party that reveals to them, perhaps for the first time, the extravagance of God. And this, it transpires, is what Jesus thinks they need to know first: that God is not a half-empty God, nor yet a half-full God, but a full to overflowing and beyond-type God.

We so often look at our glass and perceive it as half empty, but God is profligate in his bounty. We start everything so readily from a sense of shortage. We might not have enough, we might not be able to make it, it’ll be hard, all this negativity……. And yet this story makes it abundantly clear that it’s not about what we’ve got, it’s about what God is giving us. And what God is giving is far more; more than we can imagine – the wedding party ended up with far more wine than they could possibly drink. And if we start from there, perhaps we give ourselves the opportunity to see things differently.

I had to go to not one, but two Deanery meetings last week: and when clergy get together, it goes one of two ways – either they big up how it’s all going, or they get really rather negative. And it’s too easy for us to do the negative thing in life, not just in this business. To say: look at how the congregations are ageing, getting less able, or in parishes like St Peter’s, where we are lucky to have so many young, vibrant, creative, able people in the congregation, we say: look how busy they all are, and how little they can give of their time and multiple talents.

And then we say: money is always tight, we’re going to struggle to pay our parish share again this year. (And to some extent it’s true – churches are expensive places to run, and we don’t very often manage to pay all that is asked of us, and we DO have to try harder to make ends meet). But at the same time, we can do it in that defeatist tone of voice, or we can say: Isn’t this amazing! Look at what God has given us and isn’t it wonderful! God is giving us this group of people who are, some of them, older and more experienced, with all sorts of wisdom, and equally He is giving us young people and families which help us to think about the whole range of humankind who come to church at all. God is giving us to each other…….. so now, what is this gift about? What can we do? Not what can we not do?

A friend was telling me the other day about a quote he found on the Order of Service for the funeral of an elderly priest. It read: Life is about the glory of God; not about my personal development… To attempt to live by that would be a huge step forward for all of us.

The community of learning gathered by Jesus is about precisely this. About realising this as a fact. We still operate out of the half-empty, but we can choose to change that mindset and be transported and transformed by God’s extravagance and his glory.

The same friend asked what single word might be used to describe Jesus in this story – and most of us might opt for something along the lines of: extravagant. Or profligate. Or generous. And he asked because he had watched a podcast in which a respected theologian had used the word ‘relaxed’ as his choice of descriptor for Jesus – not in this particular story, but in general.

And Mike struggled to understand why he had chosen ‘relaxed’, until the theologian explained that Jesus lived out of the kingdom, so eternity was in his every waking moment. If we think about the boat in the storm from Mark 4, the weather turned bad and the waves were crashing, but Jesus was asleep. Completely relaxed. Then the disciples panicked and woke him up. He got up, stilled the storm, and asked them why they were afraid. Chilled out. And he was right. If we are living out the kingdom, which is eternally secure, then what have we got to worry about? Do we think Jesus was sitting in a corner at that wedding at Cana, just wishing it was all over? Probably not – if he took them all to a party, we can guess that he was planning on partying. Relaxed again. Probably on the dance floor. ☺

And how do we best learn to see God’s glory and abundance? The answer to that lies in Mary’s words to the servants: ‘Do whatever he tells you’. Our obedience to Jesus’ teaching is the means by which our belief, our faith, our trust will grow.

We need eyes to recognise Jesus with us in our daily lives. We need ears to hear what Jesus wants of us, and mouths to share that with others. We need hearts ready to respond to his call. Whether that is to something really exciting, or whether it is more like the tedium of filling six stone jars with up to 180 gallons of water. ‘Do whatever he tells you’ says his mother, and that is, in a way, the instruction that prompts Jesus to embark on his own fantastic journey.

Let’s all learn, with those new disciples, to relax as Jesus relaxed, and to look for the Kingdom by recognising the extravagance with which God blesses us and to know that, whatever we might think, our glasses will be filled to overflowing.

**Amen**