

Sermon for Epiphany 3 Year B Grenoble

Readings: Genesis, Revelation and John 2 v1-11

Shortly after we arrived here in Grenoble we decided we would like to have a run out in the car to some nearby countryside.

We got out the map and spotted the Lakes at Laffrey and thought we would go there. Now, don't laugh but I thought that because they were lakes they would have to be low down; as rivers tend to run along valleys! We didn't have winter tyres or snow chains so we needed to go somewhere that didn't involve too much altitude!

So we headed off and all was going well until the N85 started to climb and we reached the sign that tells drivers that 'snow chains are needed in winter, beyond that point'!

So much for my theory!

(So off we went back into Grenoble to Norauto to buy some snow chains to put in the boot).

When we got to Laffrey the roads were clear but there was certainly a lot of snow on the ground.

Signs are there to draw our attention to something: in this case to the fact that the road could be dangerous in winter weather and we needed to be prepared.

As well as exploring the country around here, we have also been visiting places in the city. Isn't the tram a wonderful thing! We are not used to travelling by tram because we live in the countryside miles from **any** kind of public transport. We are enjoying using them to get us around and, apart from David's invaluable help, we have been very reliant on the signs to guide us; for getting a card, how and when to validate the card, where to get on and off and, very importantly, that flashing diamond sign that reminds us to be careful when crossing the tramway!

Signs are there to draw our attention to something and they shouldn't be ignored.

In our gospel reading, John described Jesus' miracle at the wedding as a 'sign'.

So, if turning water into wine is some kind of sign, then the important message of the story is **not** the miracle itself but what the miracle reveals about the one who performed it. What does the sign tell us?

John tells us that the sign reveals the glory of Jesus and it reveals the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Through this sign, the disciples were enabled to put their faith in him.

What does it actually mean to say that Christ revealed his glory? ***What is the nature of that glory and what does it tell us about the sort of God that Jesus reveals to us?***

How do you think of God? Some people think of him as like a clockmaker – he created the world and all that is in it, wound it up and then left us to get on with it. A distant God not particularly interested in what's happening on earth.

Or maybe we see him as someone we may need at some time; a get out of jail free card. Someone it will be helpful to have known when we come to the end of our lives. As the writer Albert Camus wrote 'I'd rather live my life as if there is a God and die to find out there isn't, than live as if there isn't and die to find out that there is'!

These understandings of God bear no relation to the God we hear about in today's gospel reading.

That tells us that God cares about individuals. He has a whole universe to look after so why would he be interested in one couple and their small village wedding? But God does care and Jesus did care. In spite of his rather brusque response to his mother – something along the lines of 'Mother, stop telling me what to do' he makes sure the family is not disgraced by running out of wine and he does it in such a way that won't draw attention away from the couple at the centre of the celebrations on their special day.

We have a ***caring*** God who is alongside us, offering to be involved in our day to day lives and to share in our worries and concerns, our sorrows and our joys. It's up to us whether or not we accept his offer.

And Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine also tells us importantly that God is ***generous*** to the point of being reckless!

Jesus doesn't ask the servants to bring him a few jugs of water to turn into wine. He gives wine in huge quantities to everyone who wants it. It is thought to have been the equivalent of about 1000 bottles of wine! He doesn't prescribe who should have it, or how much, he just provides the wine; no conditions attached, and he does it quietly with only a few people knowing what had happened.

He transformed the ordinary into the extraordinary.

God wants only the best for his creation and for his people.

Another sign of God's generosity is that the wine that Jesus provides is not any old wine, it is the best wine that anyone has ever tasted, an unexpectedly extravagant wine which they would have remembered long after the party was over.

As revealed by Jesus, we have a God who cares, who is interested in everyday life; a God who is generous beyond all measure; and a God who wants only the best for us.

We may hear about this miracle and think 'that's all very well and good and amazing but how does it relate to me? We've never seen water turned into wine.

But perhaps we have seen God's transformative work in other ways?

To see, we need to put away any ideas that God is far away, distant and disinterested in us. Maybe we don't expect to find God at work in the mundane, everyday life.

We need to learn to expect the extraordinary.

Look back to Mary, who told the servants 'do whatever he tells you'. I think Jesus may have been a bit taken aback by that remark and we sense a bit of tension between them there. But Mary knew to expect the extraordinary. She had been visited by an angel, by shepherds telling their amazing story, and heard Anna and Simeon's prophecies.

Mary had been shaped as someone who could see the extra-ordinary appearing in the ordinary, so she had confidence that her son could do something extraordinary at this wedding.

She expects it so she sees it.

I am sure that some of you could tell me about times when the ordinary has been transformed into the extraordinary. You may not even have recognised it at the time, but, looking back you could see God at work.

A time, perhaps when, what you may have thought of as a strange coincidence was actually God's unexpected provision for you.

Or moments when you feel you have glimpsed God's glory; when the veil between heaven and earth seems very thin?

Or maybe a new beginning that you weren't expecting and hadn't foreseen.

Or perhaps you have had one of those Epiphany moments when something suddenly seems much clearer and your faith has deepened as a result.

The images we have of God will influence our expectations; which in turn will influence what we see.

If I think God is a bit of a kill-joy and a grumpy old man, then I won't expect to see God at work in the ordinary.

But if I understand God to be close to me, interested in me, a generous and loving God then I will see God at work in the world.

John said that Jesus' miracles were signs and when he records those miracles he is pointing to Jesus glory; times when the ordinary is eclipsed by the extraordinary.

Revealed by Jesus, we have a God who cares, a God who is generous beyond measure, a God who wants only the best for us.

What should be our response to this generous, loving God?

Well, that's something for you to think about and something we will come back to in a couple of weeks' time!

In the meantime, look for God in the everyday, accept his offer to be alongside you and praise him for his love and generosity.

Thanks to be God for his transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary, time and time and time again.

Amen.