

Water into Wine

John 2:1-11

McLaren quote

Worship the hermeneutic of the gospel

This morning, I want to take this well known story of water and wine, and explore three moments...

And having looked at these three moments, I want us to think about the next 12 weeks, and 12 words that we are going to allow us to engage with this story.

Glass Is Empty

The first moment that I want to come to is an empty wine glass.

It's the moment that is a disaster and it is also the moment that gives us our whole story.

Someone, somewhere at a wedding lifts their wedding glass to filled, and it is not filled.

That is the moment.

And you might say - what is this, a whole talk on the running out of wine.

That is what happens all the time, you always run out of wine at some point.

But at a wedding this was deeply shameful, speaking to the family not having enough.

Last year, I was conducting a funeral for Flo from Cambuslang, my old Session Clerk, of whom I was very fond. And she had especially asked that I conduct our funeral - for her daughter Joyce and her son Thomas, it was a big deal for me to conduct the funeral. "Oh she would have wanted you to do it" said Joyce.

They came all the way up to Aberfeldy from Cambuslang - they'd never been here before - to prepare for the funeral, and they arrived round about lunchtime. But I was in a panic that morning, there was something I had to do, and I got my timing wrong, I think that they had arrived early - that's my excuse - so they arrived all the way from Cambuslang, at lunchtime, and when they arrived I gave them a cup of tea.

Oh my mother would have had something to say about that - said Joyce as I left,

At the wedding the following week, all I got from Joyce, was "a cup of tea". We came all that way and a "Cup of tea". Every time she repeated the story I was absolutely mortified.

Now take my embarrassment now, and multiply that by a hundred,
And you are at the embarrassment of the family in the face of this wine running out.

And I want to connect this to our most embarrassing, or shameful moments, the moment when we have got things deeply wrong, and this has become known, or worst still our secrets that are not known.

That is the moment that you have to bring to this story.

The Six Jars

And there is another kind of moment too.

The six jars of purification, that are at the wedding, filled with water, the jars that attendees would have used to purify.

A number of years ago I was involved in a campaign to recruit Church of Scotland ministers, and we went to a big Edinburgh advertising agency to look at the best way of recruiting. The advertisers and marketers were there in their nice cars, ironically the offices were a converted Church, but they had taken this building and made it beautiful for beautiful people with beautiful furniture and everything beautiful.

The CEO of the advertising company came down to join us - I think something within him was quite pleased that he was helping out the Church of Scotland, it was something a bit different from his usual clients.

And as he spoke with us about the Church of Scotland, he said, I don't go to Church, I like the Church, but my one experience of being with the Church of Scotland, was when I was a boarding pupil at Dollar Academy. Every Sunday we were ordered to dress up in our kilts and our smartest uniform, and we marched over to the Church and attended the service, and then an hour later we marched back.

Do you know, it was comfortably the most dull and boring hour of the whole week.

This story speaks to the way that Church and religion have utterly failed to connect, generationally with the people of Scotland. We have become existentially boring.

I say that the greatest problem that the Church of Scotland faces is not to do with the organisation of presbyteries, or means of finance, or even the number of ministers - the reason is that for at least 100 years we have peddled a spirituality which is fundamentally boring - it does not connect, and it does not inspire.

In the millennia since Christ walked with us on this Earth, we've often tried to box up the "wind" in manageable doctrines. We've exchanged the fire of the Spirit for the ice of religious pride. We've turned the wine back into water, and then let the water go stagnant and lukewarm. We've traded the gentle dove of peace for the predatory hawk or eagle of empire. When we have done so, we have ended up with just another religious system, as problematic as any other: too often petty, argumentative, judgmental, cold, hostile, bureaucratic, self-seeking, an enemy of aliveness.

Irrelevant
And
Insipid

Disconnected
And
Dull

And as a result our Church buildings are turned into offices for advertising agencies, with their beautiful images and beautiful clothes and beautiful beards - the ones that claim we have found out what is relevant and interesting, what is connected and inspiring.

**** Brian McLaren

This image of the empty glass, speaks to the failure of Jesus religion of his day,

And the religion of our day,
To be actual religion,

Because you see the word religion comes from a latin word Ligare meaning connection - it is the same word that our word ligament comes from.

True religion does not connect

False religion exists in a side cabinet, admired, humoured, but not seen as in anyway relevant to life.

Or to too many religious people, living in a compartmentalised way, their religious life has not connected to their body, the their career, their sexuality, their use of money, their politics.

We have become irreligious.

Disconnected

The empty wine glass is symbolic of our shame

The six water jars are symbolic of empty religion which has failed to connect and is no good whatsoever when the wine runs out.

Jesus Enters

Bless Mary in this story,

Because she is the one who knows that Jesus is needed here.

I love her here as the one that when the wine runs out, fetches Jesus.

Even when Jesus seems resistant - Woman, my time has not yet come.

Do as he tells them.

What Mary understands

Is that the response to our shame

And the response to our dead religion

Is exactly the same

Jesus.

It's the classing story from every Sunday school sketch - what's the answer - Jesus.

Jesus is the one who can enter this situation,

And make it different.

It is him.

The great Rudolph Bultmann, the most famous interpreter of John's gospel said that the story of John's gospel was of a man who came down from heaven, with a message, and then returned.

That is it, the essential essence of John - a man comes, he gives a message, and then returns.

And what is the message, the message is this

"I am the messenger".

It's a curious disappointment, and yet an answer that I love,

Because it says that the answer, the message, is Jesus.

Him at weddings, him with blind men, him with Nicodemus,

Him with the woman at the wedding.

It's me.

It's him.

That is the essence of the Gospel - Christ has come

To our shame

To our empty religion and he is going to transform it.

Even bigger than an understanding of Paul's gospel expanded into a theory of penal substitution - which I believe in, but that theory is a part of the gospel, is the grounding of the gospel, but it is not the the wholeness of the gospel.

The gospel is not simply a transaction.

The gospel is a man come to us, and to transform us, and bring us home.

And I want our religion to be religious again, to connect.

Famous for this most of all was George McLeod, who believed that everywhere was Christ's, that Christ was for the world of politics, the world of the pulpit

He was the Christ who healed bodies - one of most compelling stories of George MacLeod is from a woman, who says that her family's life was ruined by the alcoholism of her father, MacLeod spent one hour with with her Father and he never drank again.

Who when he was inaugurated as Rector of Glasgow University in his speech reminded all the scientists and philosophers that their problem was that they had forgotten the Queen of the Sciences - Theology.

Who was - and this may surprise some - deeply evangelical, deeply committed to a gospel which was grounded in the forgiving death of Christ, but opposed Billy Graham no less, because he said that Billy Graham's understanding of the gospel - Graham was reported to have been asked about McCarthy's witch hunt of Communists and replied "I have no views on that, my message is spiritual" — MacLeod railed against this - saying that this was in direct contradiction to the message of the Old Testament prophets. Interestingly this criticism - according to one of Billy Graham's biographers - changed Billy Graham and led to the foundation of the Lausanne Movement which is marked by its integration of evangelism and social mission.

Perhaps most famous was the story that MacLeod told of a boy who threw a stone at stained glass window of the incarnation. So that the text now read "Glory to God in the high Street"

All of world is God's - for all our readings of this story, this first miracle of Jesus happened at a wedding which is about the union of the body, and required the creation of wine, on the sixth day of his ministry echoing the day of creation, and from six water jars echoing the six days of creation.

This is a story which connects God with wine, and community and shame and water and all of creation. This is Jesus connected to everything.

Good Wine

And I want us to note that this is good good wine,
This is of the best.

If one of the stories about religion is that it does not connect
The other is that it is dull.

It is without excitement, but this is wine of the very best.

In his discussion of spirituality, Brian McClaren comments that Spirituality, true spirituality, true encounter with Jesus has four dimensions.

- I am spiritual - means that secular science, economics do not have all the answers
- I am spiritual - means that my search will take me beyond the boundaries of what is religious
- I am spiritual - means that it is about connecting with what is deepest in life, what makes me most alive
- I am spiritual means that I seek practical ways of engaging with the spiritual - here is where we begin with 12 words that McLaren offers, and we are going to be engaging with over the next twelve weeks.

Because that is the question, if John's message was
"Meet the Messenger, and believe in him"

How do we do that that, how do we meet?

Presence

- Here
- Thanks
- O!

Complexity

- Sorry
- Help
- Please

Perplexity

- When
- No
- Why

Harmony

- Behold
- Yes
-

In all of these, places may we meet with Christ,
May we meet with him
And be transformed
As water is transformed into wine

AMEN