



24th January 2021
3rd Sunday of Epiphany



The Gathering

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Greeting

We meet in the presence of God
who knows our needs,
hears our cries,
feels our pain,
and heals our wounds.

Song: The church's one foundation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHCqXL3mCwU>

Prayers of Penitence

By the mercies of God,
let us confess our sins and present our bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to him,
which is our spiritual worship.

Lord Jesus, illuminate the darkness in our hearts:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, open our eyes to your saving love:
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, unstop our ears to hear your living word:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

May God who loved the world so much
that he sent his Son to be our Saviour
forgive *us our* sins
and make *us* holy to serve him in the world,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Collect

God of all mercy,
your Son proclaimed good news to the poor,
release to the captives,
and freedom to the oppressed:
anoint us with your Holy Spirit
and set all your people free
to praise you in Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Liturgy of the Word

Genesis 14:17-20

¹⁷ After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹ and he blessed Abram, saying, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.

²⁰ And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.' Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 128

¹ Blessed are all who fear the LORD,
who walk in obedience to him.

² You will eat the fruit of your labour;
blessings and prosperity will be yours.

³ Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
round your table.

⁴ Yes, this will be the blessing
for the man who fears the LORD.

⁵ May the LORD bless you from Zion;
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.

⁶ May you live to see your children's children –
peace be on Israel.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Rev. 19:6-10

⁶ Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

'Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.

⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear.'

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)

⁹ Then the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' And he added, 'These are the true words of God.'

¹⁰ At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus.'

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Song: Water you turned into wine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iO-qvwgTq2Q>

Gospel Reading

Alleluia, alleluia.

We have seen his star at its rising,
and have come to pay him homage.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John. Glory to you, O Lord.

John 2:1-11

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.'

⁴ 'Woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.'

⁵ His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from eighty to a hundred and twenty litres.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water'; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.'

They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.'

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

It is probably not news to anyone that, at the junction of Penhill Road and Hurst Road, there is a roundabout! On that roundabout there is a signpost directing people to St. James church. It is not always the most helpful of signposts because quite frequently you will find it pointing along Hurst Road in the direction of Bexley. I assume some locals think it is an enormous joke to spin it round and try and send people off in the wrong direction. Anyway, in theory, that sign points people towards the church building. However, we then need another to sign to reveal to people where the church building is and, consequently, we have signage up for that too. In passing we would do well to remember that not everyone sees that signage, or recognises it for what it is. When out and about I have had more than one conversation which goes along the lines of:

“Which church are you vicar of?”

“The one on Penhill Road at the junction with Bladindon Drive.”

“Oh, you mean the one up by the roundabout?”

“No, the one on the corner of Bladindon Drive.”

“Oh, I thought that was a hall.” (Once I was told, most vociferously, that no such church existed!)

“No, it’s a church building as well as a community space. There are signs up and an illuminated cross which you can see at night.”

“Oh, I’d never noticed.....”

In theory there are signs which point people towards our building, and others which announce ‘here it is’. They do not always work well.

John’s gospel contains seven signs which have a specific purpose and verse 11 of our reading tells us what that is: they are designed to reveal the glory of Jesus. Put another way, they reveal who Jesus is.

If we were gathered in church, I’d ask you to list these seven signs in the gospel and give edible rewards to those able to name one. So, if you want an edible reward, I have chocolate for the first 10 people to send me an email, or ring up and leave a message, telling me what those seven signs are. (Heads up, the turning of water into wine at Cana is the first of them!!)

There are plenty of rabbit holes one can disappear down when thinking about this account of what is probably the most famous wedding in history. The dialogue between Mary and Jesus, the role Mary is playing, whether that speaks to an ongoing role, the historical accuracy the account, the symbolism of the account, who the wedding couple are and Jesus’ relationship to them, the culture of shame, the ‘audience’ for the sign, Christ as the bridegroom, the dating surrounding the event, the significance of the jars being stone as opposed to clay, the heavenly banquet, the copious amount of wine produced, God’s generosity, the best being saved until last,.....Eleven verses can throw up quite a lot!

At the heart of this we see that Jesus transforms water into wine. Therein lies the sign and sometimes it is easy to get distracted by all the hullabaloo that surrounds it. Jesus takes something which is completely ordinary, the water, which in this case had probably been set aside for a specific use, and completely transforms it both in its substance and in the purpose for which it will be used. Frankly, you cannot have a more radical transformation.

Where Jesus is present, where the Kingdom of God is present, in either individual lives or the corporate life of a community, we see transformation happening. It might not always be as dramatic as water turning into wine, but it will be there, nonetheless. And I do think we need to keep at the forefront of our thinking these two big questions:

1. How does being in communion with Jesus transform my life as an individual, and my relationships with those around me?
2. How can I engage with others to help bring about transformation in the community and world in which we live?

We do not have time to dig into both questions, so we will not try to. However, I would say that part of the answer to the first lies in a regular pattern (and I don't mean once a week at church!) of worship, prayer, bible reading and bible study. I would suggest that that is the seed bed in which everything else grows.

Part of our answer to the second lies in finding that balance between corporate worship and corporate service. Of course, at present that is particularly problematic. Recently I got quite cross with someone who suggested that in the current climate corporate service should replace corporate worship and that that service was, indeed, our worship. To my mind whilst service can be an expression of worship, in that it can be an offering to God as well as to our neighbour, it very easily slips into becoming the object of worship instead. Worship and service are, it seems to me, two sides of the same coin and prioritising one, to the exclusion of the other, would be like running a car without ever visiting a petrol station!

What is key is faithful attentiveness to God, and a willingness to act. Mary trusted that somehow Jesus was going to be able to do something about the immediate crisis in front of them. In that faith she petitioned and then she, and others, acted on the words of Christ. "Do what he says" she tells the servants.

Those words echo down through the ages.

"Do what he says."

But we cannot do that unless we are attentive to Jesus in the first place and then be willing to act. In the gospel story of today the demand was not particularly onerous; fill six jars to the brim with water and then distribute it. I suspect a lot of the time God asks us to use the resources we already have; it is just that on occasions we are asked to re-purpose those resources. Churches up and down the land are wrestling with issues surrounding vision, method and resource. The current covid-19 crisis has brought some of those issues into sharp focus, but in reality they were always there. How do we seek to love God and neighbour, to give God the honour we are called to give and to serve our community? How can we be signposts pointing towards God (and not towards ourselves) and announcing the Kingdom of God is here, now, in Blendon or wherever we might be? These are not rhetorical questions, put at the end of a sermon to wrap things up. They are the foundations upon which we build our ministry.

Answers on a postcard, and there's an edible reward for any I get!!

Shalom,

Ian

Affirmation of Faith

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

We pray that Christ may be seen in the life of the Church.

You have called us into the family
of those who are the children of God.
May our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ
be strengthened by your grace.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us.

You have called us to be a temple
where the Holy Spirit can dwell.
Give us clean hands and pure hearts
so that our lives will reflect your holiness.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us.

You have called us to be a light to the world,
so that those in darkness come to you.
May our lives shine as a witness
to the saving grace you have given for all.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us.

You have called us to be members of your body,
so that when one suffers, all suffer together.
We ask for your comfort and healing power
to bring hope to those in distress.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,

in your mercy hear us.

You have called us to be the Bride,
where you, Lord, are the Bridegroom.
Prepare us for the wedding feast,
where we will be united with you for ever.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy hear us.

Jesus, Lord of the Church,
you have called us into fellowship with all your saints.
We unite our prayers with theirs
and ask for grace to serve you with joy
where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for all eternity.
Amen.

The Peace

Christ is our peace.
If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.
The old has passed away: behold, everything has become new.

May the peace of the Lord be always with us and all those we love.

Song: The heart of worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0a9T0UtJBQ>

An act of Spiritual Communion

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day.
Amen.

Lord, in these days of mercy,
make us quiet and prayerful;
in these days of challenge,

make us stronger in you;
in these days of emptiness,
take possession of us;
in these days of waiting,
open our hearts to the mystery of your cross.

Song: Is he worthy?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-c6pl6CaiD0>

May God, who in Christ gives us a spring of water
welling up to eternal life,
perfect in you the image of his glory;
and the blessing of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

The Dismissal

To God the Father, who loved us,
and made us accepted in the Beloved:
to God the Son, who loved us,
and loosed us from our sins by his own blood:
to God the Holy Spirit,
who spreads the love of God abroad in our hearts:
to the one true God be all love and all glory
for time and for eternity.

Amen.