

PSALM 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

JOHN 2 verses 1 - 12

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.

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

“GOD IS WITH US IN THE ORDINARY”

READING: *John chapter 2 verses 1 - 12*

The song by Abba, “Thank you for the music”, begins “I’m nothing special, in fact I’m a bit of a bore...” Sadly, that is how many people see themselves – nothing special. Whilst humility is a good quality, when it is applied to the extreme, it can be very damaging. Especially in the act of prayer we can find ourselves wondering why the great Creator of the Universe, our Holy God would want to listen to my prayers, my ramblings when there are greater needs in the world besides mine. We could fall into that trap of thinking that no one really cares about me, about my life, about my problems. When Jesus came as the child in Bethlehem, when he was given the title “Immanuel – God with us” it was to be a constant reminder that God is with us all the time; in every situation, God is there. Even the main characters of the story of Christmas remind us of those whom God comes to – Joseph, a humble carpenter; Mary – a young virgin girl; shepherds – going about their daily business; even the Wise Men, were foreigners from the Far East.

The year just gone has been one of the most difficult years which the current generations have had to live through. For many there has been the feeling of being overlooked by society, of loneliness, of not feeling that they really matter. Even that feeling that God has become somewhat distant. For the first few weeks of this New Year, by looking at some of the early miracles of Jesus recorded in John’s Gospel, I hope and pray that we will realise that the power and presence of God is with us in all of the aspect of our lives. I want us to realise once again, if not for the first time, “Immanuel – God with us.”

Weddings happened every day in Galilee. The wedding ritual was fixed and everyone would know what happened and when it would happen. Because every wedding was somewhat the same, they could be rather monotonous. Well, that was until Jesus attended a wedding in Cana.

After living for 33 years in relative obscurity, Jesus appeared to begin His ministry. He did nothing to stand out from the crowd until He came to where John the Baptist was baptising in the River Jordan. John immediately recognised Him, and was taken aback when Jesus presented Himself for baptism. John said, **“I need to be baptised by You, and do You come to me?” (Matthew 3 verse 14)**. Nevertheless, Jesus said, **“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting to fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3 verse 15)**. After His baptism, Jesus began to gather around Himself those men who would become His disciples. When Nathanael showed amazement at how Jesus knew where he was when Philip, another disciple, told him about Jesus. His amazement was greatly increased when Jesus said, **“You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.” (John 1 verse 50)**. What was going to unfold would make what Jesus had said something of an understatement.

Our reading begins with the words, **“On the third day”** telling us that what is about to happen was quite early in the ministry of Jesus. John, the gospel writer, highlights the miracles which Jesus would carry out as being “signs” – signs that would point to who He really was and not just another miracle worker. The miracle at Cana would be the first of those signs. Running out of wine at a wedding was not exactly the end of the world, but the couple and their family would be disgraced if they were unable to meet the expectations of their guests. Here Jesus revealed His compassion for the couple and the families concerned.

We are not told who was being married, but that is not important. Whoever the bride and groom may have been, Mary’s firstborn had been invited to the wedding meaning that it was possible that they were related. John is also careful to state, **“The mother of Jesus was there.” (John 2 verse 1)**. It is as though he wants us to take special note of this fact. Beside Mary and Jesus, the disciple band was represented as well.

It might seem just a matter of fact when we read, ***“The wine ran out...” (verse 2)*** However, this was a disaster, a mistake from which the couple might never recover. You could imagine that if Facebook, Twitter and all the other social media platforms were available in those days, the messages would be flying around. Why it ran out, we do not know. Perhaps it was a hot day and the guests were really thirsty. Perhaps the host families had economised and failed to buy enough wine. We really don't know what why there was not enough wine; however, in the bigger scheme of things, it is not important why it ran out at the reception that day. What is important is that it did. If the hosts did not provide drink soon, the party was over, and the reputation damaging gossip would begin. On hearing this, Mary had a quiet word with Jesus ***(verse 3)***. But why? Was it just a statement of fact, or was it because she expected Jesus to do something about it. Until now, there is no indication that Jesus had done anything spectacular and perhaps Jesus's response was somewhat dismissive, even rude ***(verse 4)***. But Mary knew, in her heart, that Jesus was no ordinary man, and just left it with Him saying to the servants ***“Do whatever He tells you” (verse 5)*** .

If you and I had changed water into wine, we would let people know. But Jesus was different. It was a wedding. No one expected anything beyond the ordinary. The servants knew that the wine was being consumed at an alarming rate. Finally it happened, not a drop left. Disgrace loomed large, then Jesus stepped in. No magic words. No waving a wand over the jars. He didn't ask people to pay attention to what he was doing. In fact, most of the guests would never know how close they were to an early end to the celebration. Other than His disciples, who appear to have been standing close to Jesus, the servants were the only ones who knew something significant had taken place. You can almost see the wonder on their faces. They knew they had filled the jars with water, carrying the water from a well and emptying the water into the jars. Six jars, each holding between seventy and a hundred litres, had been filled. The servants hurriedly carried the water in. They had heard this man, Jesus, instruct one of the servants to draw some out in a cup and give it to the master of the feast – like an ancient times wedding planner or master of ceremonies. Not knowing what had been happening behind the scenes, or what he was tasting, the wedding planner was quite astonished, exclaiming to the bridegroom, ***“Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now” (verse 10)***. You can imagine that the bridegroom was quite mystified, not fully taking in what this wedding planner was saying. All the wine came from the same source, but here this wedding planner was saying that something new had taken place. None of the guests, with the exception of the servants, Jesus' disciples and His mother, knew what had happened. Mary knew because she asked her Son to do something and He did something! The disciples realised what had happened because they were actually with Jesus, watching Him as He performed this miracle. The servants knew because they actually brought the water and drew some of the wine to take to the master of the feast. The servants would not be permitted to speak about it because of their status. For those present with Jesus, this was an event that was fully known. For everyone else, it would remain a mystery until John described what happened in his Gospel.

A nice story with a happy ending, but full of meaning. God is present and works in the ordinary and the mundane ways of life. If Jesus was willing to work a miracle to save someone from a social disgrace, how much more can we trust Him with the greater problems we face. The Apostle Paul reminds us ***“Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4 verse 6)***. In EVERYTHING – not just the big, life changing or life threatening things – let your requests be made known. God delights to work in the monotonous, everyday things of life. We may well be excited by the dramatic, but God works deliberately and in the routine of life.

Through this year, I hope we will remember the truth that we are never alone. That we trust in the presence and power of God in the ordinary things of life. If it is a concern to us, you can rest assured that it is worth taking our concerns in prayer to Him. Nothing is too trivial.

GOD IN YOUR ORDINARY

The miracle at the wedding in Can was not a healing, an exorcism, or a resurrection. Jesus just simply turned water into wine. Yes, it was an amazing feat, but what was the point of it? When we think of the other miracles Jesus performed, this one was quite ordinary. If you have time, and with the current lockdown, some may have just that, why not take some extra time to reflect on how God interacts with you in your ordinary, normal and everyday life.

1. Has God ever answered a “big request” in your life? Has He ever answered a “small request”? If so, what were they? How did God answer?
2. The apostle John wrote ***“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.” (1 John 5 verses 14 – 15)***. On a piece of paper make 2 columns. In column 1, list the “big” things that are causing you anxiety and concern. In column 2, list the “small” things which cause you anxiety. Which of these, in both lists, have we brought to God in prayer, and which have we not? Why?
3. One thing which differentiates Christianity from other world religions is the intimacy which God has with His people, From the Old Testament through the New Testament, God is portrayed as being involved, being near and present, not cold or distant. God was so involved with His creation that He came and dwelt among us in the form of Jesus, giving us hope that God really cares about the ordinary parts of our lives, and that we can bring anything to Him. Matthew records Jesus’s words: ***“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ‘Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.’” (Matthew 7 verses 7 – 12)***. What happens when we ask, seek or knock? What types of requests does this cover? What is significant about that fact?
4. In **verses 9-10** of the above passage, how does Jesus describe “your Father in heaven”? How does this help you to understand what God is like and how He cares for you?
5. This passage ends with a verse that is often referred to as “The Golden Rule”: ***“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (verse 12)***. This might seem to be out of place here, but how do Jesus’s words in **verses 7-11** support this idea?

PRAYER

God, make me aware of your presence today. Allow me to hear your voice as I work, spend time with others, take care of my family and loved ones. I confess that I do not always believe that you care about the regular, ordinary moments of my life, but I need help even in the smallest things, such as my attitude, energy levels, patience and work. Remind me to surrender every fear and anxiety to you, no matter how small it is. Thank you for caring about me and the ordinary parts of my life. Thank you for being a good Father.”

As you go about your day, allow God to be involved in the ordinary things and tasks of your life. Ask Him for small things as well as the big things. Pay attention to His presence with you, and as Mary said to the servants ***“Do whatever he tells you” (John 2 verse 5)***, listen to what He might be saying to you.

(based on “You are never alone: trust in God’s presence and power” by Max Lucado)