

Contexts

John's Gospel – in brief

- **Structure of John's Gospel**

1:1-18: Prologue – An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word.

1:19-12:50: Part One: The Book of Signs: the Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they do not accept him. The purpose of the 'signs' in John seems to be to lead his listeners into contemplation about the person of Jesus, and therefore, into deeper faith in the God whose love is shown through human beings (disciple-believers).

Chapter 6 – Jesus, the Bread of Life is right in the middle of The Book of Signs – a central text in more ways than one!

13:1-20:31: Part Two: The Book of Glory: To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.

21:1-25: Epilogue: Galilean resurrection appearances and second conclusion.

- It is the only Gospel to call Jesus "God".
- Purpose of Gospel is so that those who follow Jesus might have the kind of faith that would give them eternal life, namely, the faith that Jesus was God's only Son, possessing God's own life and had come into the world from above that people might be given that life (and thus be begotten by God) and become God's children. (Raymond Brown SS)
- Jesus is 'The Bread of Life' who feeds, nourishes and sustains the children of God.

John 2:1-11 – things to notice

- We read John's account of the wedding feast at Cana. John is the only Gospel to have this story. For some reason the Gospel of the 2nd Sunday of Ordinary time is always from John.
- The miracle at Cana is the 'first of the signs given by Jesus' – first of 7 'signs' (from the Book of Signs – above) in John – signs which attest to Jesus' divine origin and status. Others are:
 2. Healing the royal official's son in Capernaum in John 4:46-54
 3. Healing the paralytic at Bethesda in John 5:1-18
 4. Feeding the 5000 in John 6:5-14
 5. Jesus' walk on water in John 6:16-24
 6. Healing the man born blind in John 9:1-7
 7. Raising of Lazarus in John 11:1-45
- Israel often imagines its relationship with God in terms of a marriage and a wedding feast. There are many references to this in the OT scripture, including the first reading from Isaiah today. Note the last line: 'As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so will your God rejoice in you'!
- Jesus and the disciples are at the wedding feast which probably lasted for several days.
- The wine runs out.
- Mary notices and mentions this to Jesus – note Mary is referred to only as 'woman' or 'the mother of Jesus' in John. She is never named.
- Jesus' cold reply – why turn to me, my hour has not yet come? Another favourite expression in John (the hour).
- Nevertheless, Jesus acts.
- Water meant for purification is changed into wine, and very good wine at that – cf dialogue between steward and bridegroom. The water of purification has become the wine of festivity (joy)!

- 'First of the signs given by Jesus' – John wants us to read *the signs* in his Gospel story. John present 7 signs in the Book of Signs.
- Last line: He let his glory be seen (epiphany), and his disciples believed in him.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

Remarkably, the Gospel of the 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time is never from the Gospel of the Year, it is always from John.

Year A – John the Baptist proclaims Jesus as 'the Lamb of God' (Jn 1:29-34)

Year B – The call of Andrew & Simon Peter (Jn 1:35-42)

Year C – The Wedding at Cana (Jn2:1-11)

Each of these Gospels shares the theme of Epiphany, or the 'revealing/proclamation' of Jesus and his divine status. A more dynamic way of talking about Epiphany/revelation would be *God shining forth*.

In a way these Gospel readings continue the theme of the Feast of the Epiphany (the Gospel for this feast is about the visit of the wise men or the magi). The Feast of the Baptism of Jesus (last week) also has heavy epiphany (revelation about Jesus) overtones in its Gospel (this is/you are my beloved son; listen to him/my favour rest on you/in you I am well pleased).

So, the Gospel of the 2nd Sunday continues the *epiphany* theme. Why? It comes from a previous arrangement of Gospel readings for the Feast of the Epiphany in which all 3 Gospel stories were celebrated on the same day (pre 354AD). A practice still common in Orthodox traditions. In our cycle of readings we have 3 consecutive Sundays (Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord & 2nd Sunday of Ordinary time) all sharing the same theme of epiphany, and all occurring at the beginning of a new year.

Weddings are usually wonderful occasions. Family and friends come together to witness to and celebrate a couples' love and commitment. The ritual is crowned with singing, dancing, eating and drinking. It has been so for centuries. In Jewish tradition a wedding could last for days, not hours.

It's interesting that, in John's Gospel, Jesus begins his ministry in the warm and homely setting of a village wedding in the same region in which Jesus had grown up. Mary, Jesus and his disciples have been invited.

Disaster strikes when the wine runs out. It's not hard to imagine how acutely embarrassing and humiliating that would have been for the wedding couple and their families. From then on the wedding would have been remembered as, 'the one when the wine ran out'.

Mary sees what has happened and mentions it to Jesus but he seems reluctant to do anything about it: 'My hour,' he says, 'has not come yet.'

In John's Gospel, Jesus' hour will come on the cross, when he will reveal God as God truly is, through the sacrifice of divine love for the world.

Mary is not put off by Jesus' reply. Perhaps she knows her Son better than he does himself at this point. 'Do whatever he tells you,' she says to the servants.

Even though his time had not yet come, Jesus acts with kindness and compassion, saving the couple from acute embarrassment and ensuring that the wedding celebration can continue with plenty of 'the best wine'.

In telling this story, John is drawing on Old Testament themes which picture God as the 'bridegroom' of Israel. The bond of love between God and Israel was meant to be deep and enduring - like a marriage. Such themes led to the expectation that the promised Messiah would restore this relationship.

In Jewish tradition it was the bridegroom's responsibility to provide the wine for the wedding. In John's story it is Jesus who ends up providing an abundance of the best wine, revealing Jesus as the divine bridegroom, come to take Israel back as bride.

At the end of this Gospel passage, John tells us that Jesus' action in turning the water into wine was the first of the signs he gave. In John's Gospel there will be six more. All of them to do with healing, saving, restoring, feeding and giving life to human beings. None are empty displays of Jesus' power. The 'glory' of Jesus lies in revealing the God of love, especially in moments of real human need. The signs show that the power of love which comes from God is always at the service of human beings.

We, too, are called to allow the glory of God to shine out through us in loving, healing, transforming words and actions.

In using the power for good that God has entrusted to us we reveal the true face of God – not as old man, harsh judge, punisher, but as lover and rescuer of human beings: God *shining out* through us.