

Isaiah 62:1-5 'I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me.

To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, "Here am I, here am I."

²All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations – ³a people who continually provoke me to my very face, offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on altars of brick; ⁴who sit among the graves and spend their nights keeping secret vigil; who eat the flesh of pigs, and whose pots hold broth of impure meat; ⁵who say, "Keep away; don't come near me, for I am too sacred for you!"

Such people are smoke in my nostrils, a fire that keeps burning all day.

Psalms 36:5-10 I have a message from God in my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before their eyes.

²In their own eyes they flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their sin.

³The words of their mouths are wicked and deceitful; they fail to act wisely or do good.

⁴Even on their beds they plot evil; they commit themselves to a sinful course and do not reject what is wrong.

⁵Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.

⁶Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep.

You, Lord, preserve both people and animals. ⁷How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

⁸They feast in the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights.

⁹For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. ¹⁰Continue your love to those who know you, your righteousness to the upright in heart.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to dumb idols. ³Therefore I want you to know that no-one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no-one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

John 2:1-11 On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ²and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When 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.'

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

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

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

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

They did so, ⁹and 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 ¹⁰and 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.'

¹¹What 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.

The Wedding at Cana, and other signs

Different gospels have different strategies to structure their telling of the story of Jesus.

Mark plunges you into the story, following the disciples as they discover that their rabbi is more than a teacher, more than a prophet, but the Messiah. From that moment of recognition, half way through the gospel, Jesus is on the road to crucifixion.

Matthew groups Jesus's teaching into five major blocks throughout his gospel.

John's gospel divides roughly in half, between 'the book of signs' and 'the book of glory', with the change between chapters 12 and 13. But John also leads us through the revelation of Jesus with three different systems. In John's gospel Jesus says 'truly, truly I tell you' 25 times. Each of those occasions is worth paying attention to.

John has seven 'I am' discourses, in which Jesus declares who he is — ranging from 'I am the bread of life' to 'I am the true vine' to 'I am the resurrection and the life.' The other gospels do not have these passages.

Thirdly, John reveal Jesus's status as Messiah and the nature of the Kingdom of God through eight signs. I think of them as seven miracles that Jesus performs, and then the final miracle is the Father's resurrection of his Son. John sets up this system of 'signs' with his first two miracle accounts, but then stops numbering them, expecting us to follow the pattern.

The first is the change of water into wine at Cana. The second is also in Cana — the healing of a nobleman's son (chapter 4). Then a lame man is healed (chapter 5). Then five thousand are healed, quickly followed by Jesus walking on the water (both chapter 6). A man born blind is healed in chapter 9, and Lazarus is raised in chapter 11. Each of these signs tells us more about Jesus, and his kingdom, until the final great miracle of Jesus's own resurrection, vindicated by the Father against the miscarriage of justice overseen by Pilate.

The wine at Cana and the feeding of the five thousand are miracles that are not 'necessary' but they are full of the loving magnanimity of God. They transform human poverty into heavenly abundance, telling us that God's economy is bigger, more generous, more exuberant than our own. These miracles are not about gluttony, nor debauchery, but overflowing joy at the love of a couple getting married and the celebration of the people. It is about saying that whatever joy there is in normal human life (of which there is much), God loves this and craves to amplify it and enrich it.

The healing in Cana was of an official's son. The son is not present, but Jesus assures the official that his son will live — and the man goes home in faith, sure that Jesus has healed him, from afar. He goes home to learn that his son *has* become well the exact hour that Jesus had spoken. And he, and his whole household believe in Jesus. This is in contrast to the crowds who refuse to believe *until* they see a miracle. The official believes before he has evidence of the miracle — and so it is with God's kingdom. The faithful have their faith rewarded, but those who are looking for signs and wonders see nothing.

The next healing is of a lame man, who has been waiting by the pool of Bethesda for the waters to stir. Jesus takes the initiative and tells him to get up, take his mat and walk. He does so, but he comes across as quite ungrateful for his freedom from decades of dependency.

When he is told off for carrying a mat on the Sabbath he does not rejoice in his healing, but blames Jesus for telling him to do it!

Between the feeding of the five thousand and a long discourse on Jesus as the bread of life we find sandwiched (see what I did there?) Jesus's walking on the water. This is almost an afterthought for John, it is dealt with so briefly, but other gospels bring our attention to Jesus's total command of creation. Even the wind and the waves obey him! Who but the Word (who was present at the dawn of creation) could act this way?

The healing of a man born blind is significant in two ways. Old Testament prophets had performed most of the kinds of miracles that Jesus performed, including healing and raising the dead. But none had healed the blind. Jesus was the first, and this marked him as a class apart from all the former prophets. But of course this is a *sign*, it is about seeing the light, seeing the truth and about the banishment of darkness. The blind man sees, while the pharisees who interrogate him in disbelief remain blind.

The raising of Lazarus is a wonderfully moving passage about faith, love and hope. Mary and Martha already believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. They already believe that they will rise again on the day of the Lord. But the fullness and the enormity of this are made known to them when Jesus calls Lazarus, dead several days, out of the tomb.

All these miracles are the prelude to Jesus's own resurrection of course. None of us would be here without the resurrection, because without that Christian faith would be dead in the water. We are who we are and we do what we do, we worship God and we are transformed in the power of the Spirit *because Jesus rose from the dead*.

Together, these miracles sum up God's love, generosity, compassion, command over creation, redemption, and his will to release and renew. We are in Epiphany season, and each of these signs is an 'epiphany' a revelation of God's true, awesome nature.

But — for John's gospel at least — it starts with a wedding in a Galilean village. An embarrassing lack of wine, a discreet call for help from Jesus's mother, and the transformation of the good into an abundance of the exceptional.

I'd like to suggest you spend a few minutes dreaming of, and yearning for, Jesus's transformation of the world now, into the exceptionally wonderful that it might be.

Amen.