

Reflection on John 2:1-11

St Ninian's Lyneham

Epiphany 2, January 16, 2022

I wonder if you are familiar with the film “Chocolat”, which was first released twenty two years ago?

The film portrays a conflict that arose between the uptight mayor of a small French town, the Comte de Reynaud, and Vianne an itinerant chocolatier whose new shop opens unfortunately at the start of Lent. As the plot unfolds, the Comte undertakes to enforce Lenten observances, not just for himself, but for the whole town. Meanwhile, one by one, Vianne entertains individuals driven by curiosity about her chocolat delicacies who are brave enough to enter her shop. And one by one, Vianne's wares imbue a healing, life giving presence to members of this repressed community. In the film, Vianne is portrayed as an atheist and a pagan. And yet in the film, she is the hero, and it is the uptight, religiously observant Comte who is portrayed as the villain of the story, who ultimately meets a down fall in the film.

The film makes an interesting commentary on the Christian faith itself, a Lenten study resource has been written that is based on this film which considers the question, who is Christ? How will we recognise Christ when we see him? And what does it mean to follow Christ? Should we be like the Comte, enforcing the moral obligations on ourselves and those around us, believing that will please God? Should we be like the obliging young priest in the story, Pere Henri, on his knees in prayer in the Church? Or is it OK to be found in the Chocolaterie, sipping hot chocolate with Vianne?

Today's gospel offers a clear indication of where Jesus was to be found when he walked on earth - he is front and centre of where the action is. This reading is the Gospel of John's introduction to the person of Jesus. Chapter one establishes the identity of Jesus systematically, listing the names and characteristics of Christ. Chapter two is then the first story John has chosen to tell about Jesus, so it's an interesting choice. If it were a movie you might consider it as the opening scene of the gospel, after the opening credits have rolled. So where does John place Jesus? You will note Jesus is not placed in synagogue teaching or on the streets healing, as you might expect. Instead, John has chosen to place Jesus, for the opening scene of his book, at a party, at a wedding feast, with his mother and disciples!

And Jesus is immediately presented with a dilemma. His mother requests Jesus to consider the situation of the hosts - they have run out of wine! Jesus initially refuses to get involved, it's not her problem it's not his problem, and it's not yet his time to do anything!

Jesus mother, (we note Mary is not named specifically in this passage) is rebuked in a seemingly harsh way by Jesus. He calls her "woman", as though she was a stranger to him. And yet, Mary's response is noteworthy. She does not waver and directs the servants to "do what ever he tells you." Mary has complete confidence that despite his protest, Jesus will come good!

And she is right. Jesus does act! It's as if Mary knows the Holy Spirit better than Jesus at this moment, because even though Jesus ministry has not yet officially begun, she understands the self giving nature of God's spirit will not hold back. Even though the human Jesus is reluctant, doesn't a mother know their child better than they know themselves! Mary's faith in the Holy

Spirit she has witnessed in Jesus life is her assurance that Jesus will act to help the wedding party.

Jesus directs the servants to fill up six stone jars with water. Symbolically, the stone jars were vessels that held the water for ritual cleansing according to Jewish purification rites. Linda McKinnish Bridges suggests the empty vessels also symbolise the hollowness of the current traditional religion that has run dry. As the jars are filled with water, Jesus transforms that which is hollow and empty into an abundance of the finest wine, symbolising the fullness of life and joy that Christ will bring to the world.

John doesn't refer to this event as a miracle, he uses the Greek word *Se-meion*, or sign. This story is a sign because it signifies that when the Divine is at hand, there is a transformation, a fullness, something changes from the ordinary into the extra-ordinary. Each of these stone jars, which held close to 100 Litres of water, are transformed almost 600 Litres of the finest wine for this party! This story is a sign of what the Divine life is like.

The gospel writer John chooses to introduce Jesus to the reader, firstly not as a healer on the streets, or a teacher in the temple but as the source of an extravagant grace that brings joy and abundance at a party! Jesus saves face for the party host & ensures the festivities continue on. Which says something unexpected about Christ - his love extends to us in all aspects of our lives, he will celebrate with us in the highs as well meet us when we are low.

Finally, note the social location of this story. The action does not take place at a central point, such as on the dance floor, or at the banquet table. Rather, you can imagine Mary having a quiet word to Jesus, somewhere off to the side of the party. Those who were witness to the sign

were the least important people at the party - the servants! The rest of the wedding party is oblivious, it is only when the bridegroom is commended by the chief steward for keeping the best quality wine until the last that the party is aware that “something” has happened. The fact this story happens quietly away from the public view, tell you something about the way God tends to work in the world. In the least expected places, with the least expected people. In the least expected ways.

In *Chocolat*, the young priest Pere Henri, described Jesus during his Easter sermon in the following way:

“I want to talk about Christ’s humanity, I mean how he lived his life on earth: his kindness, his tolerance. We must measure our goodness, not by what we don’t do, what we deny ourselves, what we resist, or who we exclude. Instead, we should measure ourselves by what we embrace, what we create, and who we include.”

The story of the wedding at Cana offers us a surprising glimpse of the real Jesus! Too often we forget that at the heart of a life of faith, the fruit is not a devout religious observance or strict obedience to “doing the right thing”.

This gospel offers a perspective on the life of Jesus that frankly is unexpected! It’s a story about the Grace of God that is overwhelming in its generosity and abundance. It is a sign to us that the religious life should not be dry and empty like those stone jars, or the controlling *Compte* in *Chocolat*, wanting to “get things right to keep his idea of God happy”. This story reminds us that at the heart of the spiritual life, is joy! That Christ is present to us in the whole of our lives, that life is about being lived well in all its moments. And a life lived in Christ is about finding the same abundance of grace that filled those jars that offers us a fullness of life in all of its aspects. That’s it’s about first of all, learning to trust in the source of all love that upholds us and sustains us. So go ahead, enjoy drinking hot chocolate, or wine, with your friends and family! Celebrate life in all its fullness! And remember who is the giver of all good things in this life.

Amen.