

## **New wine & Weddings: The Church and the evolutionary process towards Union**

Year C Epiphany 2

Isaiah 62. 1-5, John 2.1-11

What's the definition of insanity? I don't know. But it might sound like this: Taking so much water out of a river system in one of the driest countries on the planet, to grow cotton, to send that cotton overseas to be made into cheap clothes by underpaid workers in a developing country, to send those clothes back to Australia for us to stuff our wardrobes, then our op shops, whilst the Murray Cod and other fish die in the Murray- Darling because the drought, made worse by the effects of climate change and over allocation of water for irrigation cause an algal bloom that leaves the river uninhabitable for the fish; an ecological catastrophe, a catastrophe that is being writ large all, in various ways, all over the planet.

Will we change? It seems we won't. Not until there is absolutely no other option and it's too late. For some of us the fish kill in the Murray-Darling is no real surprise. The writings been on the wall for a long time. Scientists and conservationists have been warning us about the effects of global warming and poor environmental stewardship (or lack of). But where there is so much vested interest those voices are not heard.

Isaiah 62. 1-5

'For Zions sake I will not keep silent'. Prophetic voices speak for the common good and must not be silenced. Although they mostly are. When they are silenced the transformation that they call us towards doesn't happen.

The story of the Wedding at Cana is an iconic story of transformation; the changing of water into wine. And whilst we may take this to mean individual transformation, today I want to explore it in terms of the transformation of the church. And the role that the church ought to be playing, but isn't, in the transformation of our culture such that we move out of the present insanity that seems to be inhabiting us.

It seems that we are at an impasse. An impasse is the space between what was and what can be – a space made impassable due to fear, distrust, unwillingness to move, shift, give ground and so on. The church to a large extent and perhaps the culture, is encumbered by old assumptions and ways

of thinking and acting. We are bound up and weighed down by ages old cultural accretions that bind and blind us to the God who is calling us into the future – into a new creation. And this impasse, with its characteristic split between religious and secular culture is marked by the lack of a big story or meta-narrative that might otherwise hold us together. The old Story, the Religious story, the gospel itself, has become unintelligible to a world that is now, gladly, informed by the process of evolution – the Scientific story. Today we have no over-arching story that unites us and guides us. We flounder in a world where the individual, whose autonomy is sovereign, and whose rights to use and abuse the creation are unquestioned, is at the centre.

There is no question that the church is an institution that is confronting a profound challenge and yes, impasse. The wine seems to have run out. And there's a sense in which we are standing around in the uncomfortable awareness of this yet with no idea what to do about it. In our story it is the woman, Jesus mother, who prompts the transformation of the water into wine. And in John's gospel this is the first sign that Jesus gives that he is about something new, and something big. Interesting that this first act in John is about giving life to a party, is about enabling the enjoyment of the wedding feast. And I guess we all know that generally wine gets better with age so perhaps we need to be asking ourselves, 'Is our faith tradition growing or ossifying - stuck in a medieval mire?' Is our story, or rather our way of understanding our story, stuck in the age when we thought of the universe as static, fixed. A time when we thought the sun revolved around the earth – the time before we knew that the process of the cosmos was that of evolution – dynamic, unfolding, fluid and interdepending – a web of living relatedness. As the Franciscan writer Ilia Delio says, 'Evolution marks the break from our way of understanding the world as a closed and static world of law and order and opens us to a world of change and play.' The earth, the cosmos is not a mechanism but rather a process that is continuously unfolding.

The point is that unless we truly understand this, evolution and the understanding of cosmology based on scientific discovery, then our gospel story and life will simply become a fossil. It will not do the work it is meant to do. It will not enable the life it is meant to enable. As Raimon Panikkar said, when theology is divorced from Cosmology, we no longer have a living God but rather an idea of God. And so today the contemporary prophets suggest, evolution is essential to our understanding of God and God's relationship to the world.

And today we might understand transformation as the process of evolution. Evolution not only in the scientific sense but also in the cultural and spiritual sense. And this will give rise to questions about the way we live our faith tradition. Do we understand what we are truly about or are we simply reciting old formulas that have lost their meaning for much of the world? Is our life as Christians based on an old law and order model or are we vivified by the Holy Spirit? Ilia Delio puts it this way:

“We are reaching a fork in the road; two paths are diverging on planet earth, and the one we choose to take will make all the difference for the life of the planet. Shall we continue our medieval religious practices in a medieval paradigm and mechanistic culture? Or shall we wake up to this dynamic, evolutionary universe and the rise of consciousness towards integral wholeness.” (Ilia Delio. *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution and the Power of Love*, pg. xxii Introduction)

There is an interesting point to be made about the Wedding story and some of Jesus words from Luke's gospel. For the wedding, remember at the beginning of his public life, Jesus uses the existing vessels, possibly abandoned ritual vessels, as the containers for the new wine. But later, in Luke's gospel, having encountered that hardness of heart of the religious leaders, he warns that new wine cannot be poured into old wineskins (Luke 5.37). We need to reflect on this as we consider the ways in which we understand and practice our faith.

The story of the wedding at Cana is a story of transformation which we might consider as evolution towards union. The changing of water into wine and marriage being the potent symbols in the story. Evolution is a process of the increasing complexity, through union, of creation. Our religious life, our Christian life is meant to lead us, invite us towards union with God, meaning union with all that is; the realization that we are already one with God. This is the mystic realization. The realization of our union. And this evolution towards union is the evolution of Love, of conscious Love. It is this growth towards, this evolution of our being-in-love, towards wholeness and union for which we are created. The big Story of the Universe is the story for our time. The union of the religious and scientific story may well provide us with the path towards sanity, integration, wholeness and steer us away from the path of insanity, disintegration and death. But we must be prepared to be containers for that new and ancient wine that gives life to the party – this wondrous, diverse, dynamic Life.

