

Sunday 19th January – St James Eucharist

Transformation

Isaiah 62:1-5

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11

Tomorrow is Monday 20th January – its the third Monday of the new year and this day has for a number of years been given the title Blue Monday.

Its supposed to be (in the Northern hemisphere at least) the most depressing day of the year. The popular wisdom says that by taking into account the short daylight hours, the cold and damp weather, post Christmas blues, size of credit card bills, travel conditions, time until the next holiday and a whole host of other things this is the most depressing day of the year; the hardest day to get through.

The trouble is that such predictions tend to be self fulfilling. Many people will wake up tomorrow aware that it's Blue Monday and their mood and motivation levels will be set accordingly.

The Samaritans organisation constantly reiterate that feeling low isn't something that just happens on Mondays or on some random day in January. It can happen at any time. However, rising to the opportunity, they have re-designated Blue Monday as Brew Monday and on it they take cups of tea to commuters at railway stations across the country and offer listening ears to any who wish to talk about how they feel. They also encourage others to set up Brew Monday events where there is the space and opportunity to talk about how we feel over a cup of tea. I guess our Welcome café on Tuesday is one such place where we could do this.

But for each of us I am sure there are certainly some days when we do feel lower or more depressed than other days. When the various pressures of life almost seem too much. When we might cry out with feeling "Why does it have to be like this?" And maybe some of the factors mentioned earlier might contribute towards this.

In our Old Testament reading this morning, Isaiah was writing to the Jewish people who were in exile He recognised their feelings of desolation and abandonment. He heard their cries. Where was God when they needed him – did He care for them any more? Was he even aware of their plight? How were they supposed to cope with all this on their own? They were in a Blue Monday situation. Essentially they were asking the question we just posed – Why does it have to be like this?

In Isaiah's prophecy that we earlier heard there are some wonderfully encouraging words.

*You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land Married;
for the Lord delights in you,
and your land shall be married.*

In this lovely poetic language Isaiah is saying - There is hope; God has not forgotten you; you are important – you are loved and valued. In your complaints and cries you are not seeing the whole truth about yourselves or your situation. Things will change. There is hope. It won't always be like this. And the reading finishes with the wonderful words *The Lord delights in you.*

Isaiah is essentially saying that God is a god who deals in transformations. He helps us see things from a new perspective, from a new position. He helps us to see a greater truth about reality, about who we are and what we are capable of. He helps us see that he never deserts us; he is always there – in bad times and good times. And he helps us bring that transformation about.

Our gospel reading picks up a similar theme.

It's the story of Jesus changing the water into wine at the wedding at Cana, the first of the seven signs of glory in John's gospel. Signs which point to who Jesus is and why his life and death and resurrection are so important and world changing.

You probably know the story well.

Jesus is a guest at a wedding. And at this wedding, he is told by his mother that the wine has run out. Now Jewish weddings celebrations were lengthy affairs – lasting perhaps for as long as a week - so it's easy to see how this might have happened. But this wasn't simply an inconvenience; it was a social disaster. There would be shame to live with for many a year; and the bride and groom would see it as foretelling bad luck on their future married life. You can imagine them saying "why us", "what have we done", "why does it have to be like this?"

So, at his mother's request, Jesus acts and turns ordinary water into wine. Not just wine, but choice wine. The best wine.

John describes this as the first of the signs that revealed Jesus' glory. He sees the event as looking forward to Jesus's death and therefore his resurrection; he sees it as pointing to the saving work of Jesus and anticipating the final heavenly banquet to which we are all invited because of what Jesus did. As such we can clearly see how it illustrates his glory. And we often think about the story in those terms.

But this morning, let's look at this story from a different perspective – from the perspective of transformation. Jesus takes ordinary water and transforms it into something extraordinary. Wine that is better than the best. He does more than could possibly have been imagined or hoped for.

And I think that the message of this story for us this morning is that we can look to the power of God to bring transformation to our ordinary lives so that we in turn can bring transformation to others.

God transforming our small acts of kindness and generosity into wonderful acts of love for him; transforming our faltering words into powerful words that convey his love; transforming our ordinariness into his specialness; transforming our everyday lives into extra ordinary lives for God.

Turning our Blue Mondays into days of joy and celebration. Turning our feelings of abandonment and worthlessness into certain knowledge of being loved and valued by him. Turning our weaknesses into his strengths.

Taking our gifts and abilities, our possessions and passions, our thoughts and deeds and transforming them into something special for him. Helping us to achieve more than we ever hoped or dreamed.

Too good to be true?

Lets think for a moment about how this might happen, how God might bring this transformation about.

In his letter to the Corinthians that was read as the second reading Paul talks about the power of the Holy Spirit, and in particular about the gifts of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God's presence with us. His life in our lives; his breath as our breath; his power within us.

And it's this presence of God, this power of God within us that can bring about the transformation that starts with us and flows out into the world around us.

The gifts mentioned in the passage here are some ways in which the spirit brings about such transformation. Gifts of wisdom, knowledge, healing, prophecy, tongues. Elsewhere Paul talks of gifts of encouragement, teaching, generosity and service. Each of us has gifts. Gifts that can help us to change the “why does it have to be like this” question to a “things can and will be different” statement. Gifts that enable us to be part of the transformation process. Gifts that enable us to be hope bringers to a Blue Monday world.

We might think that we have nothing to offer; that others are far more gifted and talented than we are; that anything we can do will have little or no effect. But think back again to the story of the wedding. What could be more ordinary than water sitting in stone jars. Water. Common, everyday water. And yet the miracle in the story was that the ordinary, the everyday, the mundane water was transformed into something far beyond people’s expectations; far beyond what they had ever dreamt might be possible. Not just good wine but the very best wine. The best ever tasted.

Each one of us has gifts, skills, abilities and motivations that come from God. He wants us through his power to use them for good; to bring change.

And we can see that there’s a partnership here. God working through us and with us; God giving us gifts which we put to use. God giving us the desire and the power to make the difference in the world, to be the change bringers, to be those who bring hope. God taking our ordinariness and transforming it to something special for him. All we need to do is trust God and take that first step.

So let us offer ourselves, our ordinary everyday selves. Our worries and concerns; our fears as well as our hopes. Let’s offer our whole selves to God in faith that through his presence within us, through his Spirit, through his power and by using the gifts he gives he will equip us so that we can be part of the transformation of this church, this community, this nation and the world.