

## Wedding at Cana

A few years ago Ron May organized a wonderful tour of English cathedrals. Raisin and I were able to go, as well as a number of people from Trinity. Among the places we visited were Westminster Abbey and Canterbury Cathedral. I especially enjoyed seeing those places because stones from both of them are embedded in the walls here at Trinity – Canterbury behind me at the pulpit, and Westminster behind the lectern.

At the end of our tour we had an optional two nights in Paris. Most of us took advantage of the add-on, traveling under the English Channel on a very fast train. There's nothing quite like ending up in a country where everyone is speaking a language one doesn't know. I found that as long as I confined myself to "bon jour" and "merci" I might be taken as a native. The only one who actually spoke French was John Gardner, and he assured us he didn't want us to rely on his ability to communicate.

Raisin and I visited the Louvre, of course, one of the world's premier art museums. As we had limited time, we focused on the highlights. One of those was Leonardo's Mona Lisa. We eagerly went to the gallery where it was and we were immediately disappointed. It's not a very big painting and we couldn't get anywhere near it. We weren't surprised that there was a protective rail around it. What we didn't expect were people crammed against the rail twelve rows deep. Most of them weren't even looking at the painting. They had their backs to it, holding up their phones and taking selfies. It was more important to prove that they were there than to look at the Mona Lisa.

Disgusted, Raisin and I looked to see what else there might be in that gallery. We were stunned when we turned around. Taking up an entire wall, over twenty feet high and thirty feet wide, was an enormous sixteenth-century painting of the wedding at Cana by the Italian painter Paolo Veronese. It was so large that the figures in the foreground were life-sized. We soon found ourselves standing in front of the story's wine steward, dressed in elegant Italian clothes, standing like a connoisseur examining a fine glass of Chianti. In the center of the picture, at a long table surrounded by disciples, sat a serene Jesus infused with light. Jesus and the steward were the only two figures in the entire canvas that were not shown in motion, so they immediately stood out. Curiously, the bride and groom were relegated to a far corner.

Ever since I saw that painting, I think of it when I read today's Gospel. So much is captured in the rendering of the steward – wealth, thoughtfulness, the dawning realization that this exceptional wine reveals something bigger and deeper than he ever encountered or expected. For me, that gets at the heart of what this first "sign" of Jesus means: not so much the miracle of water becoming wine, but rather the appearance of something that is totally different from what has come before.

The Gospel of John has many "signs." Some scholars suggest that John incorporated a pre-existing "Book of Signs" in his Gospel. But Jesus always says that signs are not enough for a complete, mature faith. Those who want to see miracles before they will believe will be disappointed. If you read carefully, it's not the miracle itself that made the disciples believe in Jesus. It was that this sign revealed his glory, and *that* made them believe. I think that's what's

going on within the wine steward. He's beginning to get an inkling of encountering something totally unknown, a different kind of glory from the wealth of the bridegroom for whom he works.

The Collect for today introduced us to the idea of glory. What's remarkable about that Collect is that it expects *us* to shine with the radiance of Christ's glory – so that Jesus may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth. I'm quite sure you didn't think you were signing up for that job when you walked through the church doors this morning. You may well wonder how you are going to do that. Certainly not by changing water into wine! Every once in a while I hear priest jokes about that, but no one really expects it to happen again.

The Collect speaks of the means for that illumination coming through Word and Sacrament. They are how we will be filled with the light of Christ. The Word refers to the Bible, behind which is the Word, Jesus Christ, present before all worlds. Our *Book of Common Prayer* incorporates much of the Bible's language, and each week we hear more Bible readings than many churches who call themselves Bible churches. Each week we have the Sacrament of the Eucharist, Holy Communion, in which we participate by virtue of having received the other great Sacrament, Holy Baptism. One of the great strengths of the Episcopal Church is that we experience both Word and Sacrament every week, illuminating us with the light of Christ. That is how we are able to go forth into the world shining with the radiance of Christ's glory.

The Epiphany season is when we celebrate the light of Christ. That celebration is especially full because this year we come closer to the Eastern Orthodox tradition of Epiphany. For the Orthodox, the Epiphany is the major feast of the Incarnation, not Christmas as in the Roman tradition we inherited. And for the Orthodox, the coming of the wise men is only one part of Epiphany. They also connect the baptism of Jesus, when the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove and a voice from heaven declared him God's beloved Son; and the wedding at Cana, when Christ's glory was revealed. One of our hymns includes all three – “Songs of thankfulness and praise” – but otherwise only in this lectionary year, Year C, do we hear all three stories during the beginning of Epiphany. I suppose one could say this is a “glory” year.

I wish I could have put Veronese's painting of the wedding at Cana on the cover of today's bulletin so you could take it home and study it. Diane convinced me that it would be so small that you wouldn't see any details – which makes sense, given that the original would cover our entire chancel opening. What you *can* take with you, however, is the light of Christ. It is in you because you are receiving it through Word and Sacrament and experiencing it in the people around you. That light is given to you for the sake of the world. Take that light out into the dark world that so desperately needs it. Shine brightly so that Christ may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth.

[Epiphany 2: John 2:1-11. If you want to see the painting, search *Le Nozze di Cana* by Paolo Veronese.]