

JOHN 2:1 - 3:21

Throughout the gospel of John and especially in the first 11 chapters, signs and testimony as to the identity of Jesus as the beloved of God, incarnated in flesh and blood, is a key theme. Testimony is usually offered through individuals and signs through miraculous actions and parabolic speech.

THE WEDDING AT CANA 2: 1-12

The miracle of the turning of water into wine is identified as the first of the 'signs' that Jesus did, revealing his glory. The 'glory of the Lord' was always identified with God, and when applied to Jesus it is intended to reveal his divinity as the pre-existent Word of God made flesh. Throughout John's gospel, Jesus' glory is revealed through signs and testimony. What is Jesus' glory? This miracle happens on the "third day" (vs.1), but it also is about water being made into wine in pitchers reserved for purification rites (cleansing from sin and liberation into new life). Jesus' glory is his death and resurrection and the door it opens into new life for all who walk through it. The inner transformation and rebirth to new life that Jesus brings is far greater than anything Moses could provide for the people.

The disciples believe even if they don't fully understand the spiritual meaning of the miracle. Others are simply astonished that such good wine has been kept for last. Jesus' relationship with his mother at this early point in the gospel story seems rather distant and strained. She obviously perceives his power to perform miracles (she wouldn't know they are also signs at this point), but has not yet become a disciple in the full sense. Not until Jesus is on the cross and he gives over her care to the beloved disciple, does Mary become part of the disciple community and receive Jesus as the Son of God in faith.

TEMPLE INCIDENT 2: 13-25

In the other 3 gospels, the temple incident is reserved for the last week of Jesus' life. Here in John, it comes early and marks the kind of tension and conflict between Jesus and 'the Jews' (the leadership that opposes him) that will escalate as the story develops. The meaning of this action is not about getting rid of the selling of livestock in the outer court of the temple. People came from all over the world to offer sacrifices and it was convenient for them to buy animals for sacrifice then and there rather than having to transport them.

Jesus' intention with this disruption of temple activity has two foci: 1) a prophetic action by which he is predicting the destruction of the temple which is the heart of Jewish religion, a destruction that is part of the judgement of God on Israel's rejection of God in their rejection of Jesus (God's true messiah); and 2) Jesus speaks about himself being the temple, destroyed (killed) but in three days raised up. With Jesus being the centre of faith, believers no longer need another temple in order to meet God and be saved.

In spite of this damning indictment on Israelite religion, Jesus is depicted as a good Jew who worships in the temple frequently and observes the major Jewish holidays like Passover. The indictment is aimed more at the religious leadership of Israel rather than the religion itself. According to Jesus, Judaism rooted in the Old Testament and the worship of the temple, should point to him as the fulfilment. The leadership, however, refuse to recognize Jesus, and their hearts are hardened and closed to God's glory revealed in and through him. Even though there are those who see the miracles as signs, Jesus is reluctant to trust many of the people's hearts (vs.23-25).

DIALOGUE WITH NICODEMUS 3: 1-21

Nicodemus appears 3 times in the gospel of John, and he is one of those characters who is part of the Jewish leadership and yet open to Jesus in a non-committal kind of way. Nicodemus comes out at night, an indication of his fear of being seen, as well as his fear of being exposed to the 'light'. (vs20-21)

Nicodemus recognizes the 'signs' that Jesus is doing (the temple incident being one of them) but doesn't understand their meaning. Jesus tells him that in order to understand and receive their meaning (revealing his glory) one must be 'born from above'. Nicodemus understands this to mean being 'born again.' This is not what Jesus means. Being born from above is linked to being born of the Spirit. Unless God enlightens the mind, opens the eyes, convicts the heart and inspires the spirit, one cannot see Jesus for who he is, and one cannot be transformed accordingly.

Jesus also speaks of God's whole intention in sending Jesus, namely, love for the world. Love opens the heart and makes it receptive to the Spirit. The Spirit then opens the heart and mind to: 1) the deeper truth of God's intention, 2) God's glory in Jesus as fulfilling this saving intention, and 3) the transformation that comes from forgiveness, healing, liberation and inner renewal. But many cannot and will not believe. They are not receptive or open and God cannot force God's love or God's spirit into them.

In order to believe in Jesus one needs an open heart, and one needs to be born from above. This is God's action from beginning to end, throughout one's life, throughout the ups and downs of life, the faith and the doubts. The key question is this: do we love the light, or do we love the darkness? If we love the light, we will not be afraid to be exposed (as Nicodemus obviously is) to the light. Exposure makes us vulnerable, but it is also the path to purification toward eventual resurrection.

For Next Week Read: 3:22 – 5:47