

21st May 2017 10.30 am.

(PP1) The Jesus we never knew x21.

(PP2) Jesus and the Spirit: Jesus and miracle. JOHN 2: 1 – 12

In our seeking to discover, know and then pass on the real Jesus we have spent the **Last 4 weeks** looking at “Jesus and the Spirit” – and even holding these 2 names together helps us to see and experience the real Jesus. The Father God, God the Son and God the Spirit do not work in isolation but together. Indeed, **I find it hard anymore to think of the Spirit in isolation from Jesus.**

(PP3) HOW do we experience the Holy Spirit? Both individually and in community?

Firstly, Jesus had a strong sense of his Sonship and also the Spirit’s anointing. He promises us that as we follow him we too will have an awareness of our identity as true children of God (*Abba* factor) and also the presence of the Spirit within us and upon us. We are not alone! We are not orphans – the Spirit within us reminds us we have an Abba!

Secondly, we experience the Spirit in setting and holding to our **purpose and priority? That is seeking God’s Kingdom and righteousness.** And to do this a person needs to be born of the Spirit and going on being filled with the Spirit.

Thirdly, both Jesus and the Spirit teach the Disciples of Jesus and the Spirit continues to teach us and to remind us of all that Jesus taught. (*John 6:59; 7: 14 & 28; 8:20 & of course 14: 26.*) Last week: an extension of how we experience the Spirit (point 3) is that **“The Spirit reveals the truth about God”**

Fourthly, John is explicit that the Spirit is the OTHER PARACLETE. (Jesus is the first paraclete – *1 John 2: 1*) Jesus is emphasizing to his Disciples that he is leaving but they are not alone. In his physical absence, they have the presence of the Spirit who is another Paraclete – like him. The name “Spirit” implies movement (wind/ breath) and inner enthusiasm but the name **Paraclete takes away the anguish of loneliness: she brings presence, peace, security and communion.** (*Vanier p260*) The Spirit Paraclete comes when we cry out to God and comforts us.

Today we think about “Jesus and miracle” – the “signs and wonders” of the Spirit. (*Dunn, Vanier and Yancey* all write about this).

Too many Christians think of Jesus as some sort of Great Magician (Magic – dark side – Beelzebub) OR that he no longer performs miracles. You and I can be left confused when bad things happen to good people. Theists like us don’t accept a closed universe and expect God to intervene. Deists and Dispensationalists don’t.

Jesus performed about 3 dozen (recorded) miracles. (I have listed 40 NT so called “miracles” – categorized as healings, deliverances, nature miracles). Miracles by definition are NOT ordinary everyday occurrences BUT prayer and response from God

can be every day occurrence's. (ACTS – spans 30 years' early church history – not 3 years).

Some of Jesus' miracles were witnessed by just a few of his closest friends and disciples. Jesus refused to perform miracles on demand. His miracles did NOT easily convert people into life changing faith in him. Jesus showed great restraint: in his life he did not raise all the dead – but he says he will one day. Miracles are not magic -they are signs pointing to God in Jesus.

“Jesus’ healings are not supernatural miracles in a natural world. They are the truly “natural” things in a world that is unnatural, demonized and wounded”.

Jürgen Moltmann.

The word “miracle” is not always the one that is used in the NT of these events.

- 1) **DUNAMIS** – powers, works of a supernatural origin and character which could not be produced by natural agents and means. (*Acts, Corinthians and Galatians. Galatians 3: 5 powerful works – both physical and moral*).
- 2) **SEMEION** – signs of divine authority – signs and wonders sometimes translated as “miracle”. (*Gospels esp John, Acts and Revelation*). POINTERS to those seeking the Way.
- 3) **Next week we shall see** that Paul in Corinthians talks of gifts and manifestations of the spirit in the church congregations as “miracle” or displays of divine power. He identifies gifts of faith, gifts of healing, and the operation of miracles.

The first miracle or sign of Jesus – John 2: 1 – 12.

Philip Yancey thinks Jesus' first miracle as perhaps the strangest of all and he never repeated anything quite like it. (p167).

Wedding feasts in Jesus' day normally lasted about a week and the first priority was to see that the food and wine did not run out. There was plenty of revelry and considering that some of Jesus' disciples had previously been disciples of the ascetic John the Baptist Jesus attendance at such a lush event and the miracle he performed the whole thing may have been fairly shocking. Interesting that one of the first things Jesus did with his disciples was not to take them into the wilderness for a time of teaching or prayer but to an event like this so that they could get to know him better. At a joyous celebration of love *“He thus revealed his glory and his disciples put their faith in him”* (v11).

Jesus' mother put him under some pressure to perform a miracle (she seems to be helping or serving at the wedding in some capacity as she can instruct the servants to do what Jesus says). He had come to liberate the captives so it's not surprising that he gently rebukes his mother when she tries to make him simply – a problem solver! *“Dear woman why are you involving me. My time hasn't yet come.”* So Jesus gets involved in something that is very domestic and local.

His mother puts pressure on him to perform a miracle in much the same way that the Evil One did in the wilderness temptations where he refused to turn the stones into bread when he was so hungry. But out of respect for his mother or perhaps kindness to the guests he performs a “discreet miracle” – known only to his mother and the servants who filled the 6 x 100 litre jars and carried a sample to the chief steward. His disciples obviously witnessed it too. No doubt (v12) in Capernaum after the wedding they discussed it fully.

What did this unusual first miracle/ sign mean?

Jesus miracles or signs DON'T generally contradict natural law, instead they replicate natural law but AT A DIFFERENT SPEED. (e.g. healing miracles or the vine growing, drawing up water and making fruit that can ferment into wine. Every season God turns water into wine!)

Yancey says that the symbolism of the sign is that the old ritual cleansing has ended with the coming of Jesus and the new Kingdom of rejoicing has taken over or at least is coming – ultimately in the wedding of the Lamb.

As Jesus went on in his challenge the miracles become less discreet and more controversial. He heals people on the Sabbath, he heals the ritually unclean: the woman who is bleeding and the leper, or people of other nations. So, he chooses to perform signs to make significant points as well as because he is full of compassion. John 9 – the man born blind was not blind because of personal or parental sin – but so that in the blindness and subsequent healing the glory of God could be seen. He was countering the all true prevalent error that suffering always follows sin.

Matthew 16: 4 A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! Says Jesus when someone asks for a display of his powers. A sign is NOT A PROOF it is a pointer for someone genuinely seeking the way. Jesus understood that some people only come around for the miracles and especially the food. He says – *I am the Bread from heaven!* I am a much deeper miracle. *He won't provide bread and circuses on demand!* (Yancey p177).

So some see Jesus as a “great magician”, some that the days of miracles ceased largely with the early Christian Church and some are even skeptical about Jesus. Have you heard of the **Jefferson Bible?** (Much favoured by those of a humanist bent). US President Thomas Jefferson constructed his own bible which a lot of people like to do. One day using a razor and glue he cut and pasted his version to try and get what he saw as “pure principle”. He cut out all the miracles of Jesus but also nearly every reference to the supernatural including references in the 4 Gospels to the resurrection and other passages which portray and point to Jesus as Divine, Son of God.

Indeed, there are many similar moves in our day. In 1982, I wrote my MA dissertation at the Institute of Education on the attempts of the writers of the local authority Religious Education Agreed Syllabuses for schools to seek to de-supernaturalise and de-

mythologize the Gospel accounts of Jesus. Jesus as a Gandhi type figure is acceptable to the secular mind but not as the miracle working, power of God in flesh.

BUT this is what the NT Gospels record; Jesus who did not heal everyone but did clearly perform signs and wonders – healings, spiritual deliverances and exercise his power to control nature by calming the storm and turning water into wine.

We still have to work through why God chooses on occasions to supranaturally heal those who are prayed for and at other times chooses to show his glory perhaps by slowly healing or even not healing them. I think all healing is the work of God and often God has much to teach us through timing and pain. We could tell many stories of miraculous healings in this room. But we could tell many more of how God has sustained us through pain and long term healing. We can also tell how death itself brings the ultimate healing for many and of our hope of resurrection.

Jesus in fact refused to give miracles or a sign to many people who asked for one. He declared that the only sign that would be given was the “sign of Jonah”. By this he meant that Jonah was 3 days in the belly of the whale before being spewed up and back to life – a prophetic picture of his own self being swallowed up in death and pushed forth in Resurrection Life. **His resurrection is the most amazing miracle of all.**

His first sign at the wedding in Cana demonstrates his authority to bring about change. The chief steward is impressed by the quality of Jesus’ wine: *the best has been kept until last!* Jesus’ provision is a sign of great GRACE – abundant provision – 600 litres of the best wine. Indeed, the Kingdom of God is like a wedding feast – says Jesus in one of his parables (*Matthew 22:2 and Luke 14:15 fol*).

Amos had cried out (9: 13,14) in advance of the coming of the Messiah, “BEHOLD THE DAYS ARE COMING, says the Lord, when the mountains shall drip sweet wine and all the hills shall drip sweet wine. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine.

This miracle showed that Jesus can work change – both in nature and also still in human nature. His mother Mary had faith in him. To go on working miracles of change he needs our co-operation trust and obedience. In the U.K., we are unlikely to run out of wine BUT we desperately need the sign (for all to see) of Jesus changing our watery, thin lives into lives full of the wine of the Kingdom. I encourage you to believe in Jesus the great long term miracle worker as well as the God who on occasions demonstrates his Kingdom with Signs and Wonders.