

Sign of the times



Gillian Cooper *reflects on* John 2:1-11

You know what it's like. You invite some friends round. You try to work out how much each of them is likely to eat and drink. You fill your supermarket trolley. Do you risk running out of something? Do you over-cater and waste things? Do you make sure you buy things that can be kept afterwards for another occasion?

Jesus and his mother are guests at a wedding, and the ultimate embarrassment happens – the wine runs out. Mary, like mothers the world over, expects her son to fix things. And he does. Red faces are avoided, the wine

flows freely and the host is complimented on its quality. A happy ending.

But of course there is more to this story. The Gospel writer calls it a "sign". There will be more: in the years to come Jesus will heal the sick, raise the dead, walk on water, and feed 5,000 people with a small picnic. We are learning that Jesus has unique power over the physical world. With a word he can command it and change it. And if we have read the Old Testament we know that changing the physical universe is a power that belongs to God alone. This first "sign" shows us who Jesus is. ☺

In a world that often seems random and uncontrolled, help us, Lord, to see your guiding hand. Give us faith in your power to bring your whole universe to its ultimate fulfilment at the end of the ages. Amen.

Hymn writers

John Greenleaf Whittier
(1807-1892)

by Caroline Hodgson

Whittier was one of the Fireside Poets – a group from New England who included Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Oliver Wendell Holmes. He is probably best known for "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind" which was not, in fact, written as a hymn but as a poem.

"The Brewing of Soma" conjures up images of a group of Vedic priests (an Indian sect) gathered around a blazing fire and cauldron, where they concoct and drink a powerful hallucinogenic potion extracted from plant stalks. As it takes hold they become frenzied until they're in a wild state of "drunken joy", believing they're experiencing divinity. Whittier's point was that some Christians were intoxicated by a heady mix of euphoria and rapture in worship, and that "music, incense, vigils drear, and trance", created a false sense of divinity. By contrast, Whittier believed that God could be heard as a "still, small voice of calm". ☺

New Year resolutions

Seeking the mind of Christ

by Barbara Mosse

In the end, the value of our New Year resolutions extends far beyond a resolve to eat less chocolate and be more active, useful as these may be. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul urges his readers not to get bogged down in the things of this world, but to be "transformed by the renewing

of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God".

This doesn't mean we are to turn our back on the world and our responsibilities within it (and we can still enjoy chocolate!). No – the challenge is more subtle. This New Year (and every new day) we are invited to welcome Jesus anew into our hearts, allowing him to forgive our sin, heal our wounds, transform our vision. Then, like Zacchaeus and Jacob before him, we can start out again with renewed hope and trust. ☺

“Stupidity is also a gift of God, but one mustn't misuse it.”

Pope John Paul II (1920-2005)