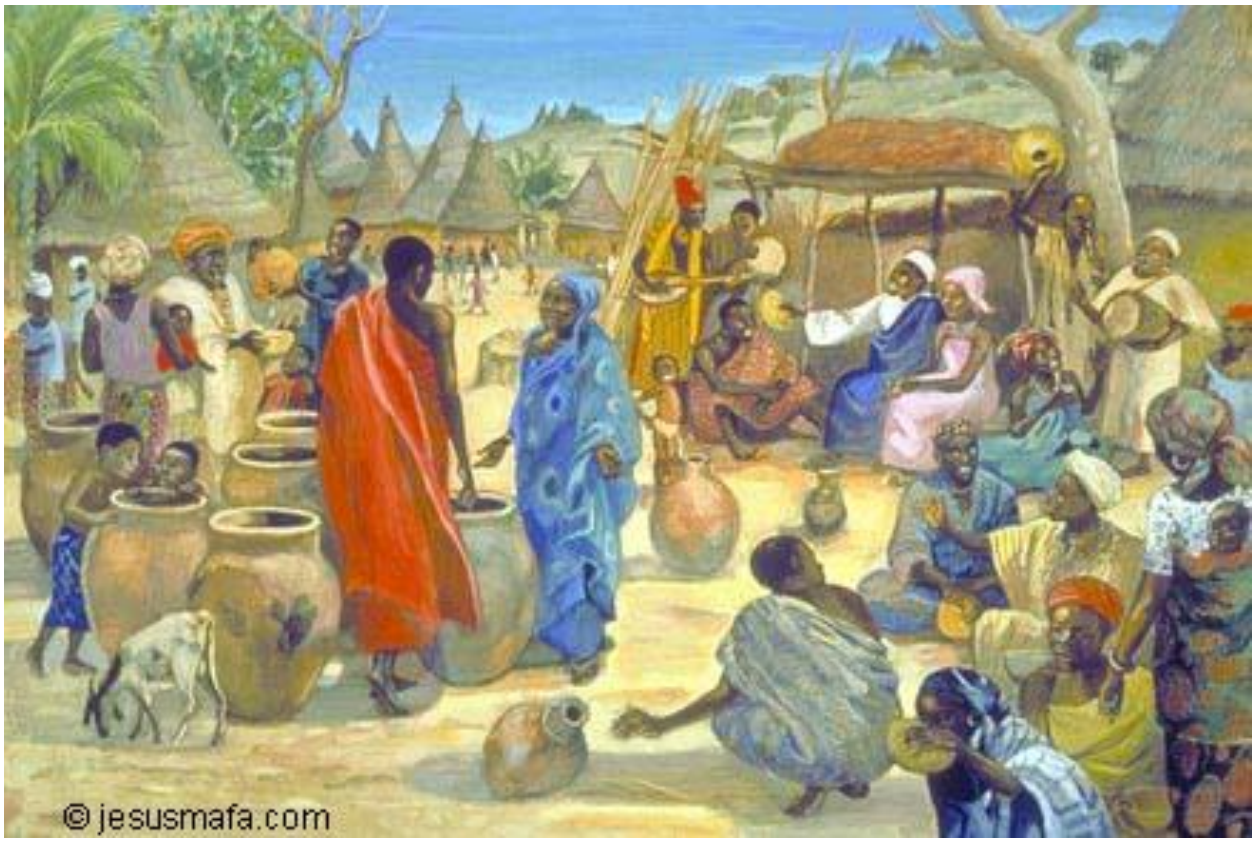
Sunday 22nd January, 2012 **Epiphany Three**

For the author of John's gospel, the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee was to be the start of the public ministry of Jesus which would, little-by-little, reveal his true nature. The author is a skilled writer with a clear theological aim. His gospel writing will reveal Jesus his power over the natural world through such events as the changing of water into wine, stilling of the storm and walking on water, eventually leading to the paradox of the all-powerful God dying on the cross outside the walls of Jerusalem.

In the Gospel of John, the writer carefully presents for our attention a series of revelations and insights into Jesus which culminate in the locked room when the risen Jesus appears to the disciples and Doubting Thomas speaks the words "My Lord and my God" as he touches the wounds of Jesus with his own hands.

So, for the author of John's gospel, the ministry of Jesus starts with what is a covert miracle and ends with a public assertion that he is the human embodiment of the Godhead.

Why did he write this work? He answers this question in the book. The author of the gospel intends his work to result in more and more people believing in Jesus as the human expression of the Godhead, the incarnate Word. Unlike the other three, John's gospel is a carefully constructed attempt to convince people to believe in Jesus by the written word.



The story of the wedding feast set in an African village

The odd thing is that Jesus starts his work in what appears to be not a planned and organised manner. The situation is that he is taken by surprise. His mother has found out that the wine is insufficient for the wedding feast which they are both attending, so she tells her son, and implicitly asks him to do something to help out.

He replies rather curtly, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come. " Would you speak to your mother like that? I hope not!

In the KJ version of the Bible, it sounds even worse! Jesus speaks to his mother in these words: - “Woman, what have I to do with thee?”

And yet, despite the rather curt words, there is an unspoken understanding between them. She ignores his curt answer and tells the servants anyway:-
“Do whatever he tells you” Jesus doesn’t even lift a finger. The words are enough. “Fill the jars with water... Now draw some out and take it to the chief steward.”

Historically, Christian commentators have been wowed by the miracle, and understandably so in times past when pre-scientific people considered such miracles as acceptable and possible.

Wedding at Cana in Galilee by Giotto de Bondone 14th century

For us in the 21st century, we need to look deeper than the miracles.

John is not simply telling stories about miracles. He is teaching his readership and the teaching is in the detail. The jars which Jesus tells them to fill with water are not just ordinary jars, but jars which were used, remember, for the Jewish rites of purification.

It is here that we have the key to this story. The fledgling Christian community was being driven out of the synagogues by the Jewish authorities and they needed to understand their plight and re-cast the religion of

their ancestors in a new mould. The Jewish purification jars become the vessels of a new wine, a new vintage, a new start, a new era, and although new it is still connected to the old, but it is a new wine which tastes even better than the first.

Even the haphazard manner in which this miracle happens is part of the author's plan. The miracle comes unexpectedly and the new wine arrives unknown to the steward of the wedding feast. It steals in and wins the show out of the blue. He said "My hour has not yet come." We also may say "My hour has not yet come." But the message for us may be that even in the entrenched lives which we lead, we could yet be surprised by the unexpected arrival of a fresh call, a new vocation, a renewed vision of what our lives are for.

The God who comes to live in a human frame speaks to us and calls us out of our everyday ordinariness into a new life of commitment, service and love.

Let us listen for that call, follow that call, faithfully and fully, even when risky.

The hour is always about the come for us.