

4th Sunday of Epiphany

Year A

Green

First Reading 1 kings 17.8-16

The Widow of Zarephath

Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 'Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.' So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, 'Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.' As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, 'Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.' But she said, 'As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.' Elijah said to her, 'Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth.' She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

What's going on?

This is the story of a miracle in which the prophet Elijah demonstrates God's purpose that the poor and deprived should be helped. The widow and her family are starving and down to their last fragments of food. Elijah prompted by God, not only creates the context for the miracle of the food that does not run out, but allows the widow to keep her dignity by including Elijah in her own hospitality – feeding him as he is feeding her.

Psalm 36.5-10

Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,

**your judgements are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O LORD.**

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!

**All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.**

**O continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your salvation to the upright of heart!**

What's going on?

The psalmist continues the theme of God's intention to care, feed and nurture people by talking about God's care for the whole creation 'humans and animals alike'. Physical care of the creation goes with God's intention to save and to protect.

Second reading 1 Corinthians 1.18-31

Christ the Power and Wisdom of God

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

**'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'**

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God

chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'

What's going on?

St Paul talks about the greatness of God's wisdom and how we should stop thinking that we know better than God. We can lose sight of God's intention to care for the creation and start thinking that we are wise, but the thing which stops us in our tracks is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. In these events God's power and wisdom are revealed and what seems foolishness and weakness is in fact the means to salvation and reconciliation with God.

Gospel John 2.1-10

The Wedding at Cana

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.'

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

What's going on?

This famous story in the gospel of John details a miracle performed by Jesus as a 'sign'. Jesus, his mother and his disciples are at a wedding and when the wedding runs out of wine, Mary prompts Jesus to act. At first Jesus is reluctant but then makes it possible for the wedding to continue by giving instructions to the servants to take water in jars which becomes wine, - the best wine of the whole party. By this means Jesus reveals his power and his disciples believe in him. By this miracle he confirms his status and role, the Son of God.

Why these passages?

These passages show us a different side of God's revelation in Jesus. We have seen Jesus beginning his ministry, but here we see him performing a miracle. What is the significance of this? The story of Elijah and the widow demonstrates God's desire that human beings should have what they need and the miracle shows God's power to act and transform the world. If Jesus is the Son of God then that same transforming power should be in evidence and for John we see it demonstrated at the wedding in Cana. God's power and wisdom are so great we cannot really comprehend it no matter how wise we think we are, but we are helped to begin to understand it by means of these mind-challenging events which made the disciples believe so firmly in Jesus.