



Who are the Heroes?

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Isaiah 62:1-5; John 2:1-12

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In the season of Epiphany, we are hoping to see, in a different way, something about Jesus that will open our eyes and our hearts once again to the power of the story of his life and teaching, and his compassion for those who are in need. It is often said that *we glimpse God* in Jesus' life and relationships with his contemporaries, in his ministry and in his concern for the well-being of people. In John's gospel images and ideas tumble over one another urging us to 'see Jesus', to really 'see who he is'.

The theologian Marcus Borg reminds us that the writer of John's Gospel did not so much record the history and memory of the pre-Easter Jesus, as the Synoptics do, but - and I quote - "his use of archetypal imagery to testify to the significance of Jesus is magnificent and powerful."

For most of us it is the imagery that tumbles out of Johns efforts to persuade us of the power and significance of Jesus that we use when we think about Jesus - especially the 'I am...' statements: I am the light of the world; I am the bread of life; I am the gate; I am the way; I am the truth and I am the life. We think about Jesus through these images, and we shape our theology and our relationship with Jesus with these images.

Today we hear John's picture story of the very beginning of Jesus's public life that commences immediately after he has gathered his group of close friends around him.

On some mysterious 'third day' (perhaps a link the resurrection story) the action commences at a relatives wedding in Cana.

In this story Jesus' Mother (her name is not used) and a group of servants (also unnamed) are centre stage: a woman and servants. These are the essential characters that frame the commencement of Jesus ministry, at a wedding - we hear echoes of Isaiah's image of God's covenant relationship with the people Israel in this story. The woman and the servants are they are the ones with whom Jesus engages; they are the causal factors that precipitate the action

that enables us to see what John is opening up for us: 'Jesus, the life and wisdom of God in human form'. I think they are the heroes of the story!

Without this woman and these servants, this story could not be told.

The woman noticed the potential embarrassment to the host because the wine had run out. She points it out, but Jesus effectively says in today's terminology, "they should have got a better wedding planner. We shouldn't interfere and cause embarrassment by drawing attention to the situation." But the woman persists and pulls servants into the action with her - to fill the jars - to provide the person power and necessary resource, water, through which Jesus could demonstrate his power.

This little 12 verse story is full of imagery. It uses marriage, the familiar image of God's relationship with humanity, the divine-human relationship; a wedding feast that demonstrates abundant hospitality, but at the wedding feast the wine runs out and water that gives life becomes the wine of a new covenant and this wine never runs out. There are so many rich images opening for us the theologian John's teaching for those who listened to him in around the end of the 1st century CE.

And a woman and servants set it all in motion.

It's a story packed with meaning and potential insight.

At this early stage in a new year, I'm wondering what the insight is that is on offer to me all these thousands of years later and in such a different context, if only I can have ears to hear and eyes to see, and enough imagination to stretch my mind to embrace the seemingly impossible.

The more I have reflected on the story it is the woman (his mother) and the also nameless servants, who keep rising to my attention.

It is a woman who notices need and dares to expect an intervention to save embarrassment, and it is mere servants who source the essential resource: both represent fringe groups to public action. They are not used to being in the limelight, being noticed.

Both are models for us, still today, within the divine-human relationship.

They are the people who are prepared to notice need and demand a response, the people who persist in their expectation till a response is made, and they are the people who are prepared to take action – to walk the talk.

We are so used to seeing Jesus as 'the hero' in the stories of the gospels that we often miss seeing others who are perhaps the real heroes. The roles of 'observer and demander of change', and those who put their bodies where

they are needed in solidarity with others who are struggling, are our contemporary equivalent roles.

These are roles we can play today in our time. We might not be big players in our society but we can notice need, and we can demand a response from those who do have the big roles and we can stand in solidarity with those responding to the need.

All too often we miss the figures of the seemingly 'little people', those without status or much by way of resources, because we are blinded by the glory of the big players who seem to be the heroes and do amazing things. We seem to love celebrities. I was thinking of this when I looked at this year's New Year's Honours List. I thought of all the people who the named recipients of the honours represent; all who worked with them, all who received the benefit of their efforts, and all who contributed to our self-understanding as a proud bicultural nation. It was the people behind the scenes who are seldom recognised that I became aware of. It was this, I think, that has opened up my awareness of the characters in John's story. We so often perseverate on Jesus that we forget to notice the other characters, named or not named, individual or collective, personal or metaphorical.

We look at Jesus, 'light of the world', and are blinded by the light forgetting and do not see what the light illuminates, what it shines on.

We forget the times Jesus tries to deflect attention from himself by going away, by telling people not to talk about him, or by leaving the scene. We need to remember, and to look again at who else is involved in the action. We might see something we haven't noticed before.

It's not in Jesus himself that we 'see God' but in Jesus's relationships and concerns, it is in the ministry and actions that he is engaged in that we see God at work.

You can be part of this work too, God's work, whether you are a 'big' player or a 'little player', named or unnamed; you can notice and you can demand action to bring positive creative change.

May this be your 2025 Epiphany.