

# Jesus first

## Part 2

### John 2:1-11 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, <sup>2</sup> and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup> When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." <sup>4</sup> "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." <sup>6</sup> Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. <sup>8</sup> Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, <sup>9</sup> and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside <sup>10</sup> and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." <sup>11</sup> This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

It's a New Year; do you want to grow as followers of Jesus this year? You could possibly say no and we could all go home early, but I think most of us want to keep growing in our faith. Now you are all probably much better Christians than I am so this probably won't apply to you but what hasn't helped me to grow over the years is making New Year lists: I must pray more, serve more, have more patience, stop accidently leaving my children on the side of the road, you know the lists. I believed that all I needed in order to grow was to have the list and a sense of determination.

Now Einstein reasoned that the definition of insanity is doing the same things and expecting different results. On that basis I have been crazy as a cuckoo bird for many years, because for many years I used the same list and sense of determination theory and getting the same dismal results. So this morning on this first Sunday in the New Year I want to share with you what I have discovered that has truly helped me to grow in my faith.

But to begin with let's think a little about what helps to motivate people to grow. There is a story of a factory that was in deep in trouble whose managers were highly political and more concerned with their rewards and privileges than they were with the morale of the workers. The factory was demoralized suffering low levels of productivity and high levels of defects, and it was on the verge of being shut down by the head office.

Instead of shutting the factory down, the head office sent in a new general manager, replacing the existing management completely. On his first day on the job, the general manager was waiting when the first shift of workers arrived that morning, parking their cars out in the unpaved parking lot and walking through the mud to the factory entrance.

When the entire shift had gathered, the new manager introduced himself, and then in front of everybody, walked over to the reserved parking spaces lined up next to the main entrance, where the executives were accustomed to parking when they arrived at work. An assistant gave him a bucket of paint, and the new manager walked along the wall, painting out the names of the executives for whom the parking spaces had been reserved. "From now on, whoever gets here first gets the best parking space," he told the workers.

That was the beginning of an incredible shift in the life of that factory. Within six months, that factory was producing at the highest level in its history, and it was one of the most productive and profitable factory operations in the entire national organization.

Management theory tells us that the factor which trumps all other factors in motivating people is the perceived relationship between workers and leaders. This is mostly about how people feel valued and encouraged in the organisation. In the Christian faith the same applies, what inspires and motivates us to grow in Christ is Christ himself, our managing director and our friend. Jesus is the best boss, coach, counsellor, colleague and companion that we will ever meet and working closely with him changes everything.

*"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10:14-15)*

## The Leadership of Jesus

To open our hearts on this issue I want to take a short visit to each of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and look at something which I think is really interesting. Early on, each Gospel has a calling of the disciple's story. Then each gospel talks about the first time that the disciples interact with Jesus and each of these interactions are quite different. It's really fascinating to see the different aspects of Jesus leadership that caught the imagination of the four different writers. But the really cool thing is when you bring these stories together they make up a fascinating picture of the most awesome leader of all time.

### 1. Encourager

<sup>1</sup> On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, <sup>2</sup> and Jesus **and his disciples** had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup> When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." <sup>4</sup> "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." <sup>6</sup> Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. <sup>8</sup> Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, <sup>9</sup> and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside <sup>10</sup> and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." <sup>11</sup> This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, **and his disciples put their faith in him.** (John 2:1-11)

To really understand this story we need to notice the way John begins and ends the story by mentioning the disciples, because the disciples are really the focus here. Jesus is at a wedding and Jesus mother Mary brings to his attention the social disaster of the wine running out. Initially Jesus is all; "this is not really my thing", then he catches sight of the disciples sitting and standing around the wedding. Perhaps they ran out of wine because Jesus came to the party with an extra 12 big lads and he feels a little responsible, but I'm pretty sure that what John is

saying is that Jesus took this moment to encourage his disciples. So Jesus organises for water to be drawn and in his presence it becomes wine. You see, for Jews, New Wine was a very common and strong symbol of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

*"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. **New wine** will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. (Amos 9:13, also Isaiah 36:17, Jeremiah 31:12, Joel 2:19, 3:19, Hosea 2:22, Zechariah 9:17, Matthew 9:17)*

In front of his disciples Jesus presents this potent Jewish symbol of the promised Kingdom with more than a hint of the power which moves a symbol from being just a dream to a distinct possibility. This is all for the sake of the disciples who in the face of this miracle have experienced their faith rising, their trust rising and a growing desire to follow this man. Jesus is the encourager; I have always found this to be true. A few weeks ago I was wondering about our healing centre. Fewer people seemed to be coming to the centre and I was wondering if we should reduce the days it was open or close it all together. That next Saturday, the last healing centre for the year God sent us three times the number of people we normally had, it was awesome. Jesus is the great encourager.

## 2. Teacher

<sup>1</sup> Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup> and he began to teach them, saying:

<sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

<sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

<sup>12</sup> *Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

<sup>13</sup> *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. (Matthew 5:1-13)*

In Matthew's gospel the first interaction of Jesus and the disciples is a teaching time which is sometimes called the Sermon on the Mount, but really should be called the classroom on the mount, because Matthew makes it clear that this is between Jesus and the disciples. It begins with this beautiful but disturbing piece of scripture we call the beatitudes. In this teaching Jesus lays out some of the circumstances the disciples are going to grow through, that's right not go through, grow through. The disciples are going to grow through periods in their lives when they feel poor in spirit, when they will mourn, when they will be persecuted and insulted. They are also going to struggle with following the way of Jesus, being meek, constantly switched on for God, being merciful, pure in heart and peacemakers. All that is going to be difficult, Jesus acknowledges that, he is onto that, but he also teaches them about these tremendous resources which are now at their disposal. Jesus is going to be there in the middle of all that difficult life stuff, He will comfort them, He will give them victory, He will fill the empty places in their soul and He will pour out mercy upon them. Through Him they will see God and enter into an intense father to child relationship with God and end their days in His eternal presence.

The Bible reminds us that Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8) which means that he is the same teacher to us as he was to the disciples. He teaches into our particular circumstances, into our lives and he teaches us what we need to grow and to thrive in our situation. I have found this to be completely true and I have seen it in the lives of many believers.

### **Rescuer**

<sup>30</sup> *Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? <sup>31</sup> It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. <sup>32</sup> Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."*

<sup>33</sup> *With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. <sup>34</sup> He did not say anything to them*

*without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.*

*<sup>35</sup> That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." <sup>36</sup> Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. <sup>37</sup> A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. <sup>38</sup> Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"*

*<sup>39</sup> He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.*

*<sup>40</sup> He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" <sup>41</sup> They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:30-41)*

Like Matthew, Mark acknowledges the importance of Jesus as teacher, but then quickly goes on to underscore the role of Jesus as rescuer. This is the first time that the twelve disciples have taken an active role in the gospel of Mark. Before that they are really just silent followers. At this point, they are still not really sure of who Jesus is: "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (v. 41). Is he the Messiah? Is he the Son of God? Is he the Son of Man? With three small words, Jesus calms the storm, and deeply changes his disciple's perception of who he is. And when he does this, he challenges them, asking, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

When I was a little grommet in the South Cronulla surf lifesaving club, my rescue instructor was a guy named Rusty, I was never able to work out why he had that nickname because he wasn't a red head. Anyway, Rusty taught us that when we reached someone in difficulty in the surf; first thing if you could, get the person's name, then using their name give continuous sharp clear instructions such as hang on to the rescue board. The purpose of this instruction was to connect with the person in trouble and break through their fear and the panic, because panic is a huge contributor to drowning. In panic some people have even drowned their rescuers. Rusty used to say that every rescue was an opportunity to teach people things so that you didn't have to go and rescue the same person again.

This is the kind of rescuer that Jesus is. The memory that Jesus is planting in his disciples is not only the memory of being physically

rescued but the memory of controlling fear. As you know, these disciples would be in mortal danger on several occasions in their life, and one of the amazing characteristics which Luke records in the Acts of the Apostles is the disciple's capacity to hold off panic in the face of danger. Not only did they trust Jesus to rescue them, His presence with them drove away fear. This applies to all of us, Jesus not only is able to rescue us from things that threaten us but he can teach us how to cope and thrive in challenging circumstances.

#### 4. Defender

*<sup>1</sup> One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. <sup>2</sup> Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? <sup>4</sup> He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." <sup>5</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (Luke 6:1-5)*

This final story in Luke's gospel is probably the least familiar of the four but it portrays my favourite quality of Jesus leadership, the defender. The scene is fairly simple; the disciples are hungry and eating grain growing on the side of the road as they walk. But this is the Sabbath and their harvesting is noticed by some pretty uptight Pharisees who get stuck into the disciples for breaking the commandment prohibiting work on the Sabbath. Instantly Jesus comes to their defence and tells the Pharisees in no uncertain terms that his boys have done nothing wrong.

A long time ago I was a young youth leader on an annual camp for underprivileged children held at Bundeena called, rather unimaginatively, September camp. One year three of the young people in my room gave their lives to Christ and we were having a conversation about baptism. The three boys were very excited by the prospect of being baptised so we all trooped down to the beach and had a bang up baptism. Later that night in the leaders de-briefing session I excitedly shared about the baptism. As I was telling the story the face of the older minister who ran the camp began to twitch alarmingly and change colour to a deep red. What followed was a five minute harangue about the several hundred things that was wrong with what I had done. It was awful, it felt awful, and while I was praying for the ground to open up and swallow me one of the other leaders spoke up and defended me.

*“John”* he said, *“Steve was just doing what he thought the Bible asked him to do, how can we call that wrong?”* Oh, bless him, on that day Dave was my defender.

Many times in our lives we will feel accused. It's one of the names of our great enemy, the accuser (Revelations 12:10). But Jesus is our greater defender who is sitting at the right hand of the father interceding for us and declaring that we are innocent and for us there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1, 34).

### **Knowing Christ**

So wrapping this up, one of the reasons that God put on a human face in Jesus is so we would know him better. Because knowing someone moves relationship from impossible to possible and knowing someone helps us to act. When Paul Simpson was just a name on a synod list, we didn't know what we were going to do because we didn't know him. Now that we know Paul and Amy, there is a stack of stuff that we are quite confident about doing because we know him. I have also found this *“knowing”* to be key in my spiritual life, while lists and determination have not always worked to grow my faith knowing Jesus more deeply and more intimately has motivated me to want to change for Jesus sake and given me the power to do so.

This year our challenge to you is really simple, do whatever you have to do to know Jesus more deeply more intimately and you will grow. Meditate on his qualities, the few that we have mentioned this morning; encourager, teacher, rescuer and defender and discover his many other qualities; faithful, prayerful, wise, good, humble, obedient, patient, kind, loving giving and forgiving. When we begin to know Jesus, we begin to trust him and allow him into more and more areas of our lives and then we can't help but grow.