

Reflection for Sunday 16th January 2022 (The wedding at Cana)

Bible readings:

1 Corinthians 12.1-11

About spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no-one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no-one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

John 2.1-11

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside 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."

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.

Reflection.

Last Sunday I was talking with someone here in this church and during that conversation I remembered an old saying about John's gospel – that it is 'shallow enough for a child to paddle in and at the same time deep enough for an elephant to swim in'.

It's thought that John wrote it when he was in his nineties. He had spent years pondering his experience with Jesus and what it all meant. He wanted to set down his understanding before his time on earth came to its close, so that we who come after him might have a basis on which to believe.

The resulting document is indeed both shallow and deep: easy to read and yet full of deeper meanings just below the surface.

And so it is with today's story. On the surface it is an almost casual miracle that makes someone's wedding day run smoother and saves embarrassment. But, of course, it's not just that.

This is the first of seven signs that John sets out to show us who Jesus really is. The signs culminate in the raising of Lazarus from the dead in chapter 11 and the answer about Jesus is that he is God. Only God can raise the dead back to life. That seventh sign becomes the turning point in John's gospel when the priests and Pharisees and Sadducees decide that this is too much and Jesus has to die. But, back to the first sign for a moment.

A first century wedding in Israel would have been an affair that involved the whole village together with extended family members from surrounding villages; probably several hundred people. To run out of wine wasn't just embarrassing, it was shameful; something that would be a stain on the family reputation for years to come. Mary wanted to avoid that disgrace for their hosts and so she tells Jesus 'They have no wine.' Without wine there would be no celebration.

It's easy to identify with that thought today. We would like to celebrate, but whichever way we look there is no wine – or for that matter little occasion for celebration. We might like to celebrate that the world is becoming a kinder fairer place, where vaccines are as equally available in poorer countries as they are in rich ones; where rules apply equally to everyone and are not broken by those who make them or think themselves above them, where people do not die trying to cross the channel in the hope of a better life and where countries don't build up weapons and armies at the border to intimidate their neighbour. At a personal level our celebrations are impeded by other things: perhaps friendships seem to have become unequal or ambitions remain unfulfilled as the years have gone by.

We would like to celebrate but we have no wine! Like Mary, we turn to Jesus to ask him to help us to celebrate, and it feels like he is telling us that it's not time yet.

'Dear woman, why do you involve? My time has not yet come.' But Mary says something that changes the whole frame of reference. She says to the servants; 'Do whatever he tells you.' Unlike many people in this modern world (including those who preach on Sundays) Mary has already lived out what she invites others to do. When the Angel spoke God's message to her as a teenager in a situation much more dangerous than the potential disgrace and embarrassment of running out of wine, her response was simply 'May your word to me be fulfilled.'

And we know what happened next in this story. Jesus turned water into wine – the first of the seven signs that he is God.

When he says that his time has not yet come, we often assume he means that his earthly ministry hasn't begun yet. But John gives us a hint at the real meaning. The very first words of our reading were 'On the third day there was a wedding.....'

I think John wants us to remember the other time that phrase is used – 'On the third day he rose again....' Jesus is talking about the hour of his death and his resurrection on the third day. That is the time that hasn't yet come. The dying and rising of Jesus change our whole frame of reference. And it doesn't just change things a bit. Six stone water jars ... each holding twenty or thirty gallons. That's somewhere around a thousand bottles of wine. Not just cheap plonk but the best wine. God doesn't deal in just about enough to go round, he deals in abundance, in cups that overflow [Psalm 23].

For us, the time has now come and with it a richness of life on offer that is beyond what we can imagine. It is sheer gift and requires only that we accept it: 'You have kept the best wine till now.'

In our reading from 1 Corinthians, Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit is given to each of us with different gifts 'for the common good'. God is always ready to pour out an abundance in the face of the disappointments and disillusionments of the world around us. If we listen to Mary's message, to do what Jesus tells us we will be empowered by God's Holy Spirit to begin to change the sadness in our lives and the injustice in our world.

We don't have to know all the solutions. Mary didn't tell the servants to go and figure out how to solve the problem. She simply told them to do whatever Jesus said. That's all we need to do. The rest is up to God.

Sometimes at the end of the service, I use a form of blessing that includes the words 'May He bring you home rejoicing at the wonders He has shown you'. Most people at that wedding probably didn't

know where the wine had come from, but I bet those that did were blown away by the wonder of what Jesus had done.

He wants us to know that same sense of wonder and joy so that we will also be saying 'You have kept the best wine till now.'

Jonathan.