



**COLLECT, READINGS AND SERMON FROM BISHOP MICHAEL  
SUNDAY 24 JANUARY 2021 – THIRD SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY**

**COLLECT**

Almighty God,  
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles  
the wonder of your saving presence:  
renew your people with your heavenly grace,  
and in all our weakness  
sustain us by your mighty power;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**Psalm 128**

- 1 Blessed are all those who fear the Lord, ◆  
and walk in his ways.
- 2 You shall eat the fruit of the toil of your hands; ◆  
it shall go well with you, and happy shall you be.
- 3 Your wife within your house  
shall be like a fruitful vine; ◆  
your children round your table,  
like fresh olive branches.
- 4 Thus shall the one be blest ◆  
who fears the Lord.
- 5 The Lord from out of Zion bless you, ◆  
that you may see Jerusalem in prosperity  
all the days of your life.
- 6 May you see your children's children, ◆  
and may there be peace upon Israel.

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### **Revelation 19.6-10**

6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; 8 to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. 9 And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words of God." 10 Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

### **John 2.1-11**

1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 9 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 10 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." 11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

### **Bishop Michael's Sermon – Quality, Quantity, Quaffability**

Are you keeping Dry January this month? I am not, but I know many who are. It is an important public health opportunity, giving up alcohol for a while after the indulgence of Christmas. This year it can be particularly helpful for us to attend to our drinking in these days of lockdown. But if you are trying to keep dry January, this morning's gospel reading might be quite a challenge, because it shows Jesus doing something very different.

At the wedding in Cana of Galilee, he produces a huge amount of wine out of water. Let's do the mathematics. Six stone jars, each holding between 20 or 30 gallons, are filled to the brim with water. Even if each jar only holds 20 gallons, this means 120 gallons, 545 litres, of wine. A standard bottle of wine today is 75 cl: so Jesus has produced the equivalent of 727 bottles for a party which has already drunk its way through the cellar. On the higher figure of 30 gallons, the stock-taking rises to 1090 bottles, I think. If you had been enjoying yourself at that wedding in Cana of Galilee, you probably would have had a very sore head next morning.

That is a lot of wine. What is the gospel trying to tell us? It is not really about drinking alcohol or abstaining from alcohol. It is, as John says, a sign: a sign of abundance, of super-abundance.

Our God is a God of excessive generosity, exuberant in the kindness he lavishes upon us. This is his nature – how he is, who he is. This theme of abundance runs through the New Testament. The Sower scatters the grain everywhere; most is lost, but what falls on good soil produces amazing yields: 30, 60, 100-fold. In another parable, workers recruited to the vineyard at the last hour are paid with the same generosity as others who have slaved through the day, to the bewilderment of all. Paul says that the love of God is shed abroad by the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the ungodly, and in their justification the justice of God bears the fruits of amazing grace. Christian faith speaks of undeserved, unexpected, unscientific abundance; this is the sign which Jesus sets before us at Cana of Galilee.

So this wedding at Cana is a story of great quantity; but it is also a story of high quality – the wine Jesus provides is of the very best. There is a man called the steward of the feast; today, we would call him the event organiser. He is the person who is meant to be in charge, making sure that all the plans go right. He is surprised that the Lord has kept the best wine till last. One early writer says that this steward is the only person whose judgement about the wine we can trust. Why is that? Well, because he has to organise the party, he is the only person there who has had to stay sober.

This best wine is kept to the end: what Jesus gives is promised as the completion of our time, the perfection of our human nature, a fullness of life for which all our days here on earth are a training and a preparation. John says that at Cana Jesus ‘revealed his glory’: that is the word he uses for the fulfilment of what we are meant to be. The glorious quality of the life Jesus offers to you and to me cannot be beaten for quality.

So we have quantity and we have quality; but any sermon needs three points, and it would be good if the third also began with a ‘q’. So, with apologies, I give you the word ‘quaffability’: by which I mean, the urge to drink more and more of this wine. For an alcoholic, of course that is a problem; but the water become wine that Jesus gives is such that we want to return to it again and again, because it changes us from glory to glory drawing us closer to the God whose nature is love.

The quaffability of this wine changes people’s lives as they grow in their relationship with God. The tradition of the Orthodox Church says that the groom at the wedding in Cana was actually Simon the Zealot, and it was because of Cana that he became one of the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus – he had been so affected by what he experienced there. There are traditions which says that Simon preached the gospel in Africa and Asia, and some say in Britain; and that he met a martyr’s death in Persia, or some say near Grimsby.

That may or may not be the case, but we do not have to be one of the twelve apostles to want to drink again and again the wine of the Kingdom which the Lord gives us, and to have our lives changed as we do that. At the moment, of course, in most of our churches we are not gathering physically for the eucharist, and when we can do so it will be a long time before we can again share in the common cup of wine. But that experience, and the opportunity of ‘spiritual communion’ which we can make online, can make us think more deeply about this great sacramental gift, which we can usually enjoy and which we often take for granted.

The early Christians saw in the miracle at Cana a pointer to the wonder of Holy Communion. One of them, St Cyril of Jerusalem, wrote this: ‘Once at Cana in Galilee he changed water into

wine by his own will; is it incredible that he should change wine into blood?' This quaffable wine of Cana draws us closer and closer to our generous God. Its quality speaks to us of the unimaginable glory to which we are called. Its sheer quantity proclaims the vastness of God's love poured out for us. And what was miraculously provided as a one-off for invited guests in one town in Galilee is now given to us all, in God's grace freely lavished upon us. Even in these times of restriction and anxiety, particularly in these times of restriction and anxiety, God in Christ renews the wonder of Cana: he gives us the abundant wine of hope, to drink again and again.

+Michael Lich