



The Good
Shepherd
Four Marks

Responding to God's Love

9th May 2021

The paper-version Service

To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service set out below.



Opening Prayer Almighty God, Heavenly Father you alone are worthy of all praise. Forgive us for the times we do not live up to your call to us to be transformed into the likeness of you Son. Thank you for your superabundant grace and the gift of extravagant joy. Help us live in this fulness of life you offer us today, and like your miracles, may we be a sign of your Kingdom, which draws others into your light, love, and life. **Amen**

Song:

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!

Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;

Tender to me the promise of his word;

In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his Name!

Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;

His mercy sure, from age to age to same;

His holy Name--the Lord, the Mighty One

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!

Powers and dominions lay their glory by

Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight

The hungry fed, the humble lifted high

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!

Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord

To children's children and for evermore!.

Read: John 1:35-50.

God brings new joy. *A summary of the talk given by Howard Wright.*

We have learnt that God is both vast enough to deal with all the concerns of the world and close enough to care. That he alone is the Messiah, but that he invites us, yes, all of us, to follow him and join in.

So, having learnt who Jesus is, we now turn to what Jesus is about. Our church's values are generosity, hope, joy and grace and here Jesus demonstrates all four of these.

John tells us that this is the first of Jesus' miracles. Jesus had promised Nathaniel in the previous story, that he would see 'greater things' and so it begins.

Wine is a symbol of fruitfulness and joy – but the joy had run out and the people are soon going to be thirsty. This is a cause of major embarrassment for the host family.

Each of the preceding three sections have started, 'The next day...' Now John says, 'On the third day...'. John has already started the Gospel with an allusion to the creation story, 'In the beginning...' Now, another allusion, 'On the third day...' On the third day of creation, God separated land from water and made fruitful plants! Here now again in this miracle, water is taken, and there is abundant fruitfulness.

Jesus produces the best wine! The deepest joy, the richest flavour. And he does this extravagantly. Each jar would have contained at least 20 gallons of water; therefore, Jesus makes a minimum 120 gallons or 600 bottles of wine. Jesus tells us that he has come to bring life in all its fulness, (John 10:10). Whole communities would come to weddings and the parties lasted up to week, but this is still a lot of wine.

Alcohol can cause profoundly serious problems, and some of us will sadly have first-hand experience of this. The Bible warns us strongly against drunkenness with direct commands and stories. If you are struggling with the misuse of alcohol, whether your own or that of someone else – please get help.

In Jesus' time, alcohol abuse and addiction were less of an issue. In their society, wine was drunk for the warm feeling it gave, but it was also drunk for its antiseptic qualities and, mixed with the often bacteria laden river or well-water, it kept people from getting sick. The Jewish Talmud direction was one part wine to three parts water. And Paul writing to Timothy recommends that he takes a little wine for his stomach and frequent illness, (1 Tim 5:23).

Jesus wants to give us freedom and bring us joy. This miracle is firstly a sign of the depth and abundance of this joy that he brings. And secondly,

this miracle is a sign of his abundant grace.

The water jars were for ceremonial cleansing, the proper washing of hands and the cooking utensils. One imagines that the containers from which the wine, which had run out, had been served, were still available, but Jesus uses these ceremonial washing jars deliberately.

Jesus brings a new deeper cleansing, a proper purification from all sin! The ceremonial washing has been replaced by grace, in a joyful superabundance. Zechariah had prophesied about the coming of the Messiah saying: "On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness." (Zechariah 13:1)

John the Baptist had already declared that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Here is a clear sign of the new deeper cleansing, this grace upon grace, that is available from Christ, the Messiah, that is, Jesus.

In our story today, only the servants and disciples know about the miracle – this gift, this kingdom of superabundant grace and extravagant joy is for us all – it includes the ordinary and broken -like me and, I suspect, you.

Although the English translation sounds harsh, Jesus responds kindly, to his Mother, Mary, 'My hour has not yet come.' This phrase appears several times in John's Gospel and makes clear that Jesus' priorities are different from ours. But Mary's response, even from her confused perspective are to instruct the servants to 'Do whatever he tells you.' This is the same Mary who thirty years earlier had said, 'I am the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you have said.' (Luke 1:38).

In response today, I want to say to myself and to you, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

Our God is trustworthy – he is the awesome God who speaks, and the universe comes into being, and yet who loves us so much that he comes close in Jesus. He changes water into wine as a sign of the superabundance of grace and extravagant joy he offers.

The disciples see the sign and put their trust in him, they follow him and do whatever he tells them. John writes: 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.' (John 1:14)

Do you see, and will you follow this One?

Prayers: Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:4-6)



- Pray for this day, and the coming week.
- Pray for justice, mercy, peace, and hope.
- Pray for individuals, for neighbours, for family and friends.
- Pray for the Church.

Collect: 6th Sunday of Easter. God our redeemer, you have delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of your Son: grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life, so by his continual presence in us he may raise us to eternal joy; 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. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**



Blessing: God the Father, by whose love Christ was raised from the dead, open to us who believe the gates of everlasting life. God the Son, who in bursting the grave has won a glorious victory, give us joy as you share the Easter faith. God the Holy Spirit, whom the risen Lord breathed into his disciples, empower you and fill us with Christ's peace. And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

The Notices: We are now holding ticketed and socially distanced services in the building on Sundays at 9.30am. Further information on our website or by ringing our vicar, Howard.

If you know of others who would like to receive this, or you would rather not receive it; or if you find yourself isolated and not able to get neighbours, friends, or family to help, then ring Howard, 01420 563344.