

24 January 2021 Third Sunday of Epiphany and Plough Sunday

Gospel 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 Vanda Perrett and Alison Joyce

Plough Sunday is often kept a week or so earlier in January than we are keeping it this year. I wanted to be able to connect this reading about the wedding at Cana to our agricultural life. It may seem a little different, but this reading is about a miracle, the first one Jesus showed. Somehow, I can never quite get over the repeated annual miracles we see in the countryside. Acres of bare earth, sown with brown shrivelled seeds, and within a few days the miracle of new growth appears. Then at harvest time all the golden beauty of the corn, the dust and dirt of the harvest, the sweat of the farm workers, resulting in, eventually, that warm delicious loaf of bread on your table. It is indeed a miracle.

Or what about the accident of birth, the seeming random impregnation of the egg, and despite all the challenges that are around the first weeks in uterus, the very frailty of new life, the dangers of the birth. Amazingly, this baby is born, whether human or calf, puppy or kitten. Or even the accident of cooking, who first decided that letting milk go bad would result in cheese?

Or combining eggs butter flour and sugar would make such a delicious cake?
Or the accident of tasting heaven in the scone, jam, and clotted cream so beloved in Cornwall?

Who would have thought that out of these accidental encounters new lives, or new experiences are made?

We have just read what must surely be the weirdest miracle story in the whole of the New Testament. Just about every other miracle that Jesus performs is in response to an individual (or a group of people), in great personal need: he heals the sick; he liberates the possessed; he feeds five thousand hungry people; he stills the storm when the disciples are in fear of perishing. But to see him in today's Gospel reading nobly stepping in to rescue a party when the drink runs out, is a little odd, to say the least.

Jesus tells the servants to fill the six enormous stone water jars that are standing nearby with water, then to draw some of it off and to take it to the chief steward. And the steward, to his astonishment, pronounces it to be a particularly fine vintage - the best wine has been kept till last. And there is an enormous amount of it: six stone water jars each holding up to thirty gallons and filled to the brim - that would make for one heck of a party. What on earth is going on here?

One of the distinctive features of John's gospel is that almost everything within it - the stories, the events and the sayings attributed to Jesus - they all operate on more than one level. You cannot simply take them at face value - you have to dig deeper to find their true meaning. And in today's story there are all kinds of clues to alert us to the fact that there is much more going on here than meets the eye.

The first clue is the setting - that of a wedding feast. Elsewhere in the gospels, when Jesus wants to describe the kingdom of heaven, he often talks about weddings. So what we seem to have here is a 'living parable' - an incident that is embodying and symbolising for us a very important truth about the ways of God.

Another clue is the ludicrous and excessive quantity of wine that is produced. For those of you who know your Gospels, this, too should be ringing all kinds of bells. In the parable of the mustard seed, the tiniest of seeds grows into a tree so enormous that birds can rest in its branches - the Kingdom of God, Jesus tells us, is like that. At the feeding of the multitude, five loaves and two fishes not only provide a meal for five thousand people but generate twelve baskets full of leftovers. The kingdom of God is like that. Hence the ludicrous

quantity of wine in today's miracle story - far, for, more than anyone could possibly want or need, even in the most wild and extravagant of wedding parties. The Kingdom of God is like that.

It is fascinating to see that here, at the very start of John's Gospel, in the first of the signs that Jesus performed, *even though his hour has not yet come* (which in John's Gospel is a reference to Christ's crucifixion), we are shown something utterly extraordinary. The story of the miracle at Cana is about far more than Jesus helpfully rescuing a wedding reception by performing a particularly impressive conjuring trick. It is a story of massive and lasting significance, which is why it comes at the beginning of the Gospel. It is a story that testifies to the extraordinary, and extravagant and mind-blowing power of God in Christ. And it is a power that can be unleashed in our very midst in the most ordinary and unpromising of circumstances.

God works in our midst, in us and through us. He takes the most basic and unspectacular of elements: water, bread, wine, seeds, ploughs, your life, my life - and transforms them into something utterly extraordinary and life-giving.

All of us, as followers of Christ, are called to communicate the warmth of God's love to the lives of those around us. The key to which, as Mother Theresa once said, is not doing great things - but rather doing small things with great love. Being the seed if you like! Our calling is to help make this community a holy place, a beacon of light and an oasis of peace for all who come. Helping to enable God's love to turn the most ordinary things of life into the glorious wine of the Kingdom.

Prayers by Carrie Snaden

At the Wedding of Cana, Jesus didn't disappoint his Mother, Mary. He wanted the many guests to be happy, just as God wants us to be happy and rejoice in Jesus' Word. Loving Lord Jesus, may I bring happiness and joy wherever I go in my life, spreading love and generosity, even when others around me do not. Lord, in Your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Generous God, as we remember the presence of your son Jesus Christ at the Wedding at Cana we pray for all we know who are preparing for marriage and those who are beginning their married life together and at this time for those who have had to put their marriage plans on hold because of the pandemic. May they experience the love of God, the support of family and friends. We also pray for any we know amongst our families and friends who are

experiencing marital problems that they may find a way forward through their present difficulties.

Lord, in Your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray the Church of God throughout the world that we may recognise each other's ministries in the service of the one Lord and discover again the visible unity in the one baptism which incorporates all in Christ. We especially remember in our prayers everyone involved in the life of the Church across our Lands End benefice and beyond.

Lord, in Your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Creator God, we pray for all who work for justice and solidarity, and for all world leaders that they will continue to seek for an end to the suffering caused by war and violence, injustice and inequality, disease and prejudice, poverty and hopelessness and bring healing to the world.

Lord, in Your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We remember in our prayers everyone affected mentally or physically by Covid-19. We pray for all NHS employees, key workers and all those involved with the rollout of the vaccines bringing hope to so many.

Lord, in Your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Lord, we ask you to pour your healing light on those who are suffering physical or mental pain. (... add names). Give our spirits power to climb to the fountain of all light and be purified. Break through the mists of earth, the weight of clay. Shine forth in splendour, you who are calm weather and quiet resting place for faithful souls. You are the journey, and the journey's end. We pray for those that are now with you on that glorious shining hill, where there is no cloud nor sun, no darkness nor dazzling light. May your one equal light shine on those whom we love and those whom we pray for, now and for all eternity.

Merciful Father: Accept these prayers for the sake of Your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

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