

## Morning Praise @ Home 21<sup>st</sup> January 2024

### Opening prayer

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**  
*cf Psalm 51*

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse *us* from *our* sins, and restore *us* in his image to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Reading

**John 2: 1 – 11**

### Reflection from Sue

#### Fresh Wine!

What do you associate with wine? A rarefied tippie for a refined palate, or a desperate glug of Chardonnay at wine o'clock?! The Bible never condones drunkenness or alcohol dependency, but does associate wine with feasting and festivities – indeed, in the vineyard-covered hills where Jesus grew up, being able to provide wine for guests was a matter of family pride.

God spoke through the writers of the Bible by linking wine's association with generosity and celebration with His lavish provision – Isaiah declares Him to be a God who prepares 'a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine - the best of meats and the finest of wines.' (Isa 25:6). Gradually, as prophets engaged with Israel's future hopes, they spoke of a coming 'day of the Lord' when, as Joel puts it, 'the mountains will drip new wine' (Joel 3:18).

As Jesus developed His ministry, He frequently told stories about a host preparing for a feast, or throwing a wedding party, where God was the party-giver and He himself would be the honoured guest.

In today's reading we see Jesus at the start of His public life, and John gives us a whacking great clue that this is a man we need to notice, because, through Him, God is doing a brand-new thing. John refers to it as a 'sign', a 'moment when heaven is opened,' as Tom Wright explains it, and 'the transformative power of God's love bursts into the present world'.

The huge urns at the bride's parents' house were there to fulfill purification rites laid down in the Old Testament:

- Priests had been expected to wash before entering the Tent of Meeting when the Israelites were travelling through the desert;
- cleansing with water was associated with washing away contamination;
- on entering anyone's home it was considered important to wash one's hands and for a servant to wash your feet, as the elders instructed.

So when Jesus miraculously transformed this vast quantity of water into about 800 bottles' worth of vintage vino, that signified:

- that God was very definitely bringing a new interpretation out of the Old Testament practice,
- that people would no longer need 'washing rites' to purify them but the actions of God's Son.
- The Last Supper is still 3 years into the future, but John, who was there in that upper room, indicates that this miracle in Cana is just a hint of what the blood of Jesus, symbolised by red wine, will go on to achieve in terms of cleansing us.

He can transform us, just as that ordinary water was transformed.

Most of the party-goers hadn't a clue what had just happened – the steward was simply re-filling their glasses. It was the servants who realised what had happened. And, of course, Jesus' disciples. They had only responded to Christ's call a few days earlier and were still pretty wet behind the ears, but witnessing a glimpse of Jesus' 'glory' here definitely deepened their trust. As John summarises: 'his disciples believed in him.'

In one sense nothing had changed – the party would merrily continue long into the night. Yet in another, everything had changed. John started his Gospel with the Word becoming Flesh, and now ordinary water is becoming wine – Jesus is quietly transforming life from the inside outwards. The old order is passing away because the new life offered by Christ has arrived into the world.

Yet, as so frequently, God works with people, inviting them to get caught up in the miracle – indeed, it only happened because of two human responses to the need:

Firstly, Jesus was asked to act. I don't think he went to his friend's wedding expecting to work a miracle that day, but his mother asked him to, and when he demurred, she persevered, relying on Him to involve himself. Because of that request, because of that persistent trust, Jesus was compassionate towards the bride's family, who were about to face social humiliation, and brought the power of God to bear.

Secondly, it took the obedience of the servants to actually 'Do whatever he tells you.' (v.5), however bonkers it must have seemed to them. Probably they were tired after working throughout an already long celebration; perhaps they only saw Jesus as an ordinary bloke who had occasionally come to the house – so who was he to give them yet more work!? ...

But, despite their doubts, despite being weary, they acted on Christ's instructions – and were suddenly, amazingly, caught up in a miracle that I reckon they were still telling their grandchildren about decades later.

Abundance! Blessing! Joy! Release from worry! A fresh way forward! That's what the bride's father received and what we may experience too:

- when we ask Jesus into the situations we face in life, believing that He can make a difference;
- and also trust Him enough to do whatever he says, however new or different to our norms.

We have fresh wine to share, which others will be blessed by experiencing for themselves. We know it is a better wine than many have yet been served, something living and dynamic, that can carry on fermenting in their lives. After all, 800 bottles needs sharing – it is not for us to hoard in our personal cellars!

And simply doing what we have always done as a church may not adequately contain Christ's fresh, transforming wine. It was Jesus who pointed out that well-used wineskins, which have therefore lost their elasticity, aren't adequate when wine is still bubbling and ripening: 'Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. (Lk 5: 37-8)' In other words, we need to be flexible about how we reach out.

- Later this year, perhaps we could run a wine tasting evening at the Gladstone Village Hall, and link it to this passage. Can you think of anybody who might like to come, as they did to the Hymns & Pimms evening?
- Meanwhile, what if we let Burton and Puddington residents know that we will pray for them, if any are facing issues which, like the bride's father, they've realised that they cannot humanly resolve? Surely we share Mary's trust that persevering in asking for Christ's involvement will make a positive difference to our neighbours?!
- Can you think of other ways to share God's generous gift?

The wine poured out from those huge urns was a cause for celebration. And we want people to celebrate still when Jesus' fresh wine is shared with them, his transforming new life, achieved by shedding His blood on the Cross. Later in this service we will commemorate how he has saved us, as we take Holy Communion. But let's just remember that God wants the Lord's Supper, His 'banquet of .. the best of meats and the finest of wines' to be 'a feast .. for all people' (Isa 25:6). **AMEN**

### **Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

### **Prayers of intercession led by Ron**

As we share a common faith and hope, let us pray trustingly together to the God who made us and sustains us. Loving God, we remember the divisions in your church and pray with Jesus that we may all be one, united in love of you and in service to your world. Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God help us to listen to your voice still calling us from our diversity. We pray for church leaders everywhere that they may work together and promote unity among Christians. Lord, you made us to be one body and of one spirit and so we pray that we might establish friendly relationships among Jews and Muslims and tear down the walls of indifference and hatred making complete unity visible and bringing healing to the world. 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. We pray especially for Ukraine, the Holy Land and Peace for the Holy city of Jerusalem. Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Merciful God, we raise before you this morning those who are sick, sad or lonely and those who are brave and patient when things are going wrong. We pray that they may be aware of your comforting presence and know that in your hands they are safe and loved. We especially pray for those from our Parish . . . . .

Father God, we also pray for those who have departed this life and ask you, through your loving kindness, to have mercy on their souls. Be with the bereaved in their loneliness and give them the faith to look beyond their present troubles to your Son Jesus Christ who died and rose again and who lives forevermore. Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord's Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

### **Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**