

## Sundays' Sermon 24 January 2021

### The Wedding at Cana John 2

#### **Part 1. Context and Expectation**

As I have said many times before 40 days is a significant time period in the Bible and in the Christian faith. When the number appears in Scripture it signifies something special has happened, is happening or will happen; it is a time of grace, or it is a period of time when God does things; and a time of transformation and change.

After the **40** day flood, a new creation begins (Genesis). After Israel's wandering in the wilderness for **40** years, they enter into the Promised Land. After Jesus' temptation for **40** days and **40** nights, he begins his transformative public ministry; **40** days after the Resurrection, we enter the age of the Church as Jesus ascends to his Father.

In the church year we have 40 days of Christmas, 40 days of Lent and 40 days of Easter. 3 significant times where something special happens; when God does things; times of grace, transformation and change.

And we're in one now! This Christmas season which lasts from Christmas Day through to 2 February is 40 days of remembering and celebrating the coming of God into the world through Jesus. A season of revelation, light and new life. This is true even in the middle of a gloomy January and a global pandemic.

In these 40 days Jesus is revealed to the shepherds and wise men and to us as God's Saviour King, Emmanuel, God with us at all times and in all places. At his baptism Jesus is revealed to us as the anointed one, the Christ, the 2nd person of the Trinity... God's beloved son. On the road to Damascus Jesus is revealed to Saul and to us as the Lord. In the temple Jesus is revealed to old Simeon and to us as the Lord's Messiah and the light for the nations. We also have the week of prayer for Christian unity, where our divisions and disunity is revealed and we pray and work afresh for unity in the diversity of the Church.

Today we recall Jesus turning the water into wine, his first miraculous sign, revealing his glory and transforming love to his disciples and to us. Let's hear this Gospel story read to us now.

#### **Part 2. Look to Jesus**

John's gospel is all about showing who Jesus is...

John 20:30-31: 30 *Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe[a] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

John's gospel can be seen as being in 2 sections... the book of signs which is the first 12 chapters and the book of glory, chapter 13-20.

It's called the book of signs because the certain miraculous events, of which there are at least 7, point to something. They point to Jesus... to his divinity, his glory, his power and his transforming love.

The wedding at Cana is depicted on one of the stained glass windows at St Luke's Church in Tutshill. Take a look next time you're there. The transformation of water into wine at that wedding was the first sign Jesus did and points to something who Jesus is, his glory and the wonderful works he will do in our lives.

As I reflect on this passage I am reminded afresh that Jesus is the one who we can turn to at any time in our lives... whether it be a wedding, a family or community gathering, a work or relationship dilemma, a

crossroads in life, or a situation of trouble, sorrow, need sickness or any other adversity... Jesus is the One we can turn to for help in time of need.

He is with us at the momentous moments of our lives. He is One who walks with us on life's journey... he is our lifelong companion (John uses the image of a wedding and Jesus being the bridegroom) to illustrate something of this.

He is the One who transforms... not just water into wine, but transforms the lives of those held captive by sin into a life of freedom and holiness; transforming the lives of those blighted by hunger, loneliness, suffering and evil... bringing joy and hope. He transforms darkness to light; and the darkness of death to the dawn of new life.

Jesus is the one who takes what is ordinary and makes it extraordinary.  
He is the one what makes what is good in our lives and in our world better.

Jesus is the one who fills the empty soul. His resources of love and goodness are infinite. Our love, our patience, our perseverance run out, but Jesus' love, grace, compassion, kindness, mercy and grace does not run out.

Many of us are tired, fed up, feeling low because of this time we're living in and feel as though we're running out of ourselves. The substantial, one could say, extreme and excessive amounts of wine, jars filled to the brim... point to a God whose resources are limitless, whose love is extravagant and whose life is the fullness of joy.

Jesus takes our imperfection and transforms it. William Barclay makes a lot of the fact that there were 6 stone jars, with 6 being the Jewish number for imperfection. The events at the wedding at Cana are at least partly symbolic of the imperfection or inability of the our own efforts to bring true cleansing or purification. But what we and the Law are unable to do; now the grace of God in Jesus is able to do. Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus is the One who brings new life, new hope and new purpose.

What I'm trying to say in all this as glib as it might seem, is that the answer to our deepest questions, needs and longings are found in Jesus!

There's that story isn't there of a pastor giving the children's talk in church. One particular Sunday, he decided to have a bit of a quiz... "I'm going to describe something, and I want you to raise your hand when you know what it is." The children nodded eagerly. "This thing lives in trees (pause) and eats nuts (pause)..." No hands went up. "And it is grey (pause) and has a long bushy tail (pause)..." The children were looking at each other, but still no hands raised. "And it jumps from branch to branch (pause) and chatters and flips its tail when it's excited (pause)..." Finally one little boy tentatively raised his hand. The pastor breathed a sigh of relief and called on him. "Well..." said the boy, "I know I I'm supposed to say Jesus...but is sure sounds like a squirrel!"

In all seriousness as I have said, the answer to all our deepest questions, needs and longings is Jesus!

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds In a believer's ear!  
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds, and drives away our fear.  
It makes the wounded spirit whole And calms the troubled breast;  
'Tis manna to the hungry soul, And to the weary, rest.

Let us take a time now to allow Jesus through his Spirit to minister to our souls.

### **Part 3. Thirsty, Drinking and Overflowing**

Last week as part of the Flourish initiative some of us attended a 2 day training event on Zoom. One of the sessions was about 'spiritual vitality' and described 3 watery images all of which can be seen in the Gospel story today.

#### **1. Empty jars & thirsty guests.**

The first image is empty jars and thirsting guests... the wine had run out. Are you empty and thirsty, but not thirsty for wine but thirsty for God and the things of God?

Where is our desire, our enthusiasm, our thirst for God? Are we empty and desiring to be filled with God or just empty with no desire?

The Bible details a lot of thirsting people, including Jesus himself on the Cross. Jesus understands what thirst and emptiness is all about and can attend to an empty, dry soul.

#### **2. Drinking**

Which brings us to the second watery image of spiritual vitality. The jars were filled and the people drank.

Jesus provides an abundance for us. He fills us and provides the means for our souls to find refreshment and revitalisation and renewal. The empty soul can drink of the Spirit of God through prayer, through Scripture, through worship and through fellowship.

In the Gospel Mary says, "Do whatever he tells you to do." Jesus tells us to attend to ourselves if we are spiritually empty or dry. Come to me... come to the Lord in prayer.

Be obedient like the servants and attend to this as much as one might attend to filling a glass full with wine or a mug full with coffee or tea.

Like the many who talked with Jesus in the Gospels, so we too can speak honestly with Jesus about everything and anything and ask him to fill our lives. Have you done that lately?

#### **3. Overflowing**

And finally, the third watery image of spiritual vitality. Overflowing. The jars were filled to the brim, presumably so full that they were almost overflowing.

Just like those jars full to the brim if our lives are filled with the things of God... and God wants to do that in us individually and as a church... so we will overflow and bring the love and life of God to others... who may be thirsty. Let us be filled anew with the presence of God to overflowing.

-Like empty stone jars, Lord, you have filled us with your goodness and grace. Now pour us out into a world that needs so much of your love and holy presence. Be with those this day who still feel empty, broken, standing all alone. Let your love flow to those thirsty for acceptance and a new beginning.