

The Wedding at Cana - Water into Wine!

John 2:1-11

Water! It is such a precious commodity.

This last week, in N Wales, over 40,000 homes had no water supply for a few days due to a burst water main. In Los Angeles, getting enough water to the sites of the wildfires has been a logistical nightmare; many tens of thousands of homes have been destroyed. In many parts of the world there has either been too much water, causing flooding, or drought, causing water shortages leading to disease, loss of crops, and so on.

But it was the wildfires in Los Angeles that got me thinking. Assuming I had more than a few seconds to evacuate, what would I save? What would you save?

I'd grab a change of clothes, and make sure to pick up the phone charger. But would I also save our wedding photographs? I'll admit that until Friday afternoon I wasn't even sure where they were. But after a few minutes looking, time I wouldn't have in a real evacuation, I did find them. I had a quick look. And I was reminded of an incident.

There were supposed to be two wedding cars, but one had broken down leaving the other to do multiple trips. Bridesmaids and mother of the bride were safely delivered to the church. But no sign of Julia! No, she hadn't changed her mind! (That was Julia Roberts in the film *Runaway Bride*.) The car was at the kerbside with the driver leaning against it. I can't remember if it was me or my dad, but one of us asked him, "Aren't you supposed to be going back to fetch Julia?" Thankfully, all ended well.

2,000 years ago, there was no photographer nor reporter for the local newspaper to record details of the happy event. However, an ordinary wedding in an ordinary small town, Cana in Galilee, has been remembered ever since.

The wedding at Cana is a familiar story for most of us, just over a couple hundred words and less than two minutes to read. It is a good story to play around with in our imagination. I want to unpack some of it for us.

In those days a Jewish wedding was a significant event, it could last several days, and often involved the whole community. We know that the mother of Jesus was there, as well as Jesus and his disciples. I doubt that when the groom's parents were planning that they realised there would be so many extras.

Otherwise, this was an ordinary wedding in an ordinary small town. There was food and drink, music and dancing and storytelling. Children too.

But something extraordinary happened. They ran out of wine!

The social stakes were high; running out of wine would tarnish the bridegroom's reputation and embarrass the family. Not the sort of memory that the wedding couple would want to reflect on in years to come.

But something extraordinary was about to happen. The mother of Jesus came to the rescue.

Mary who, since before Jesus was born, had been treasuring all sorts of things about him in her heart. As his mother she knew him intimately and she demonstrated remarkable faith in Jesus.

She said, "Jesus, they have no wine." She knew that he knew what to do. It was Jesus who was hesitant. But her faith in him was steadfast. She didn't know what to expect but was sure he'd do something. "Do whatever he tells you," Mary said to the servants. Remarkable faith!

Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Before the food could be eaten the guests had to wash their hands – as required by the law – guests couldn't just plunge their hands into one of the six stone jars; this would have made the water impure for the next guest. Instead, servants would draw water with some form of ladle and, to one side, pour this over the guests' hands.

Jesus told the servants to fill these stone jars with water. And they obediently filled them to the brim. We read this in just a few seconds, but this could well have taken a couple of hours, especially if water had to be fetched from the village well down the lane.

Do you wonder what the servants thought when Jesus told them to draw some of that water out and take it to the chief steward? But they did.

Imagine the suspense. "Wow!" the steward exclaims. He calls the bridegroom over and says to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guests have drunk too much. But you have kept the good wine until now."

There were gallons and gallons of the good wine. Jesus had saved the embarrassment of the hosts and everyone celebrated this wedding in proper style. He ensured that the start of this couple's life together was not mean-spirited and disappointing, but generous and full of joy.

The account of Jesus turning water into wine is deeply significant as the first of his miraculous signs. It involves the faith of his mother Mary. It involves the obedience of the servants. And it prompts his disciples to believe in him.

It reveals his glory, that is, his visible or tangible expression of God's divine presence, power, and majesty, and his divine authority over creation. It shows he was more than just a teacher or prophet. This miracle was a glimpse of his divine identity as the Son of God.

The miracle points to the ultimate mission of Jesus: to transform the brokenness of the world into the joy and abundance of God's kingdom. Just as he transformed water into wine, the ordinary into the extraordinary, he transforms the lives of ordinary people like you and me, through his death and resurrection. Jesus said (John 10:10), "I have come that they (us) may have life, and have it to the full."

For us, the miracle at Cana is an invitation to us to believe in Jesus' power to transform not only physical elements but also our lives—our struggles, doubts, and fears—and to share his transforming love with others, like a sign, pointing them to Jesus.

Towards of John's Gospel, we read (John 20:30-31), "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Amen