

We are working through John's gospel and last week we saw that there were five people who decided to spend time with Jesus, two of whom were brought to Jesus by their friends. One of those was Nathanael who was sceptical when Philip told him he had found the Messiah. It was only on meeting Jesus that he realised that Jesus was the Messiah. At that time Jesus said this: John 1:50-51 *'You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree. You will see greater things than that.'* ⁵¹ He then added, *'Very truly I tell you, you will see "heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on" the Son of Man.'*

There are a number of things to be conscious of in the passage we read today, and as we continue through John. We've moved from John the Baptist to new followers, and now into a wedding. Symbolism becomes really significant, and this story is full of it. John sets up signposts which take us through his version of the story of Jesus, and he even tells us that he is giving us a clue as to the truth about Jesus: John 1:11 *What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.* He gives another in chapter 4, where Jesus heals the son of a royal official, but after that we're on our own.

These signs, or clues, are all occasions when it seems Jesus did what he had promised Nathanael. They are moments when, to people watching, with a bit of faith, it appears that heaven opens and the transforming power of God bursts into the world.

And, I think that for John, that is the most important thing he wants to say – with Jesus the life of heaven comes to earth: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.... And the 'Word became human, and made his home among us'.

This story is not really about an unfortunate family at a wedding – it is about transformation. It is about the different dimension of reality that comes into being when Jesus is present, and where people do whatever Jesus tells them to do. For John this is the essence of discipleship – you cannot be a follower of Jesus if you don't do what he says. Here, his mother tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says and they do it. In chapter 4 the royal official, who has come looking for Jesus, is told by Jesus to go home because his son has been healed. We're told, 'he took Jesus at his word'. When we take Jesus at his word amazing things can happen.

This story is the first of two occasions we meet Jesus' mother in this gospel, the other is at the cross. This is so significant in explaining the seemingly offhand way in which Jesus responds to his mother in verse 4, '*Woman, why do you involve me?*' *Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.'* There will be many other references to his 'hour' as we go on through the gospel, until his time does come, and his glory is revealed fully as he dies on the cross. For the moment John is setting up a paradox, showing that Jesus was doing his Father's work and it was only his father whose instructions he would follow – yet, there is something in the heart of God that responds to cries for help.

The cross, for John, is the ultimate moment when heaven and earth meet. That is when it takes faith to see the glory hidden in the shame; the creative Word present and dying as a human being. So, John places Mary at the beginning and the end of the revelation of the Glory of Jesus.

Do you think there is any significance in the fact that John starts the story – John 2:1 *On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee*. The third day – that rings a bell. A story of supernatural transformation that happens on the third day – I'm sure I've heard something like that somewhere! Even here, John is pointing to future events in his story – on the third day water was turned to wine; on the third day Jesus rose from the dead; on the third day the disciples despair and fear were turned to joy and hope. Maybe today you need a third day experience from Jesus. (Eph 1:19-20) Maybe you have not yet believed that Jesus can make a difference in your life – if so, I have this little book that I want to challenge you with. I challenge you to use it for a week and pray every day for a week. Ask Jesus if he's real and see what happens. Maybe you already know Jesus but you have not some something he asked you to do, and you're wondering why things seem to be a struggle – the thing is that in this story, the miracle happened when people did what Jesus asked them to do, and perhaps you need to do that too.

This feast itself is a symbol of the great heavenly feast in store for God's people (Revelation 21). The water jars are used for Jewish purification rites. They're meant for washing the dusty hands and feet of guests – here John is suggesting that the water of one age must be replaced by the wine of another, i.e. the age inaugurated by Jesus. There is also the suggestion that Jesus is going to bring purification to Israel, and the world, in a whole new way.

A wedding in a small village would likely have involved most of the people there and people from further afield. That's possibly why Mary and Jesus were invited. Running out of wine was a complete disaster and the family would have had to live with the shame for years to come. It would have been considered a very bad start to a marriage. This is an example of the strange compassion Jesus shows to people who are in need and he often deals with that need in unexpected ways.

The transformation from water to wine is, of course, meant to symbolise the effect that Jesus can have, and still has, on people's lives. He came, as we find out later, that we can have life in all its fullness.

This story is also an interpretation of the hoped for final age. For John, his is the 'end-age', because Messiah had come. Today we tend to relegate the end age as an event sometime in the future which, if we're honest, we don't expect to happen in our lifetime, if it ever happens. Placing the last age in the middle of our lives, as John does, provides a significant challenge. It begs the question of my life, and yours: is it a life which puts up with the pallid water of the world or revels in the beautiful wine of the kingdom of God.

I want to read a reflection, written by Thomas Troeger, about the couple who got married that day in Cana.

I would like to think there was some wine left over.

Jesus supplied enough.

John tells us there were six stone water jars...

each holding 20 or 30 gallons.

If three jars held 20 gallons, three times 20 is 60.

And if three jars held 30, three times 30 is 90.

60 gallons plus 90 gallons

equals 150 gallons.

150 gallons!

That is a lot of wine to drink.

Especially since they had already polished off the initial supply.

Surely, one 20 gallon jar would have sufficed.

But no.

Jesus is extravagant,

wildly extravagant.

It is not unreasonable to believe some wine was left.

And I would like to think that when the celebration was over,

And the couple had left for their honeymoon,
And the guests had departed,
That some friend or family member poured the wine that remained into smaller
containers and corked them,
So that when the couple returned they were presented with several crates of the
splendid wine.

I picture the couple delighted,
Smiling to think
that on the meagre budget of newlyweds
they can enjoy such a heavenly vintage with their low-cost supper.
In the way of eager young couples,
they do not plan very well at first
So that at the end of two or three years,
They realise, that extravagant as Jesus was,
They will some day run out.
So they begin to save the wine for special occasions,
Bringing it out on their anniversary,
On the birth and dedication of a child,
At family reunions,
On high holy days that feature feasting and drinking.
And every time they taste the wine,
They relive their wedding day,
And they recall how at the first sip of Jesus' wine
They had looked at each other with eyes that shone with a love
Whose intensity caught even them by surprise.

And so the years pass
until they are an old couple,
Keenly aware that "all flesh is grass,"
springing up in youth,
Then quickly fading.
I picture the old couple on a chilly night.
She is in front of the fire, trying to warm her feet and hands for they are always
cold now.
He pauses coming into the room
where she sits on a bench pulled right up to the grate.
He studies her in the light of the fire:
the shape of her forehead,
the deep creases in her face,

and the lips he has kissed 10,000 times.
All of a sudden,
with a prompting he cannot explain,
he blurts out:
“Honey?”
at first she does not hear him so he calls again,
“Honey?”
she slowly looks up, and he says,
“Honey, what if we finish the wine tonight.
The rabbi’s wine.
There’s just one little bottle left.
It might warm you up a bit.”
“Sure, sure,” she says, “that would be good.”
So he goes and gets the wine
and brings it back to the fire with the only clean cup he can find.
He sets it down and uncorks the wine speculating:
“I wonder if it will still be good, after all these years.”
“Always has been,” she says.
“ the rabbi's wine has never gone bad,
it's as amazing as the way he provided it.”
The husband pours the first serving
and hands his wife the chalice.
She sips and hands it to him.
They look at each other and nod their agreement:
the wine is as rich as the day they were married.

They drink very slowly,
and as they drink they start to tell stories.
She says:
“I remember when Sarah was born.
You would have thought nobody had ever been a father before,
the way you carried on,
calling in the whole neighborhood, they drank an entire crate of this wine, as if
it were our wedding all over again.”
“Well, you did just about the same,
when Benjamin and Rebecca brought home our first grandchild.”
The wife laughs a hearty laugh,
“Yes, I did, didn’t I?
Oh, those were such good times, good enough to want them never to stop.”

He pours some more wine,
and they each take a sip
and he stirs the fire,
and they sit absorbed in the flame.
She sees him out of the corner of her eye
and notices he is trying to hold back tears.
She knows what he is thinking:
He is remembering when the third child died.
Been terribly sick.
Tried everything.
But he died anyway.
All she could pray for weeks on end was
“My God, my God why have you forsaken us?”
They were both so distraught,
and God didn’t seem to answer,
they didn’t know what to do but blame the other one.
One evening he came home
and she had supper ready,
and they set things out on the table without saying a single word, going through
motions that had become rituals of habit,
the only thing holding them together day by day now.
When they sat down they realized she had not gotten water from the well
and he had not brought home any wine from market.
So he got up
and found one of the bottles of wine from their wedding.
Might as well open it now.
No sense saving it for special occasions anymore.
So he opened it and poured some wine for each of them.
And when the wine touched their lips
they tasted grace in their hearts,
and they broke down and sobbed together.
The grief of their loss never went away
—how could it—
but the strength to carry the grief together
that was what the wine of Jesus gave them.
And now sitting in front of the fire,
he turns to look at her,
and hearing him move she turns toward him
and they look at each other,
and she takes his hand saying,

“Yes, Honey, I know, I know”

He is silent,

then holds the bottle upside down over the chalice.

There are a few last drops.

He hands the chalice to her:

“Here you finish it,”

She takes the smallest sip and hands it back to him

pointing out there is still the tiniest bit at the bottom.

He puts the brim to his lips

and throws back his head holding the chalice straight over him,

then slowly brings it down and holds it between them.

“That’s it,” he says

with a voice that sounds both satisfied and sad.

“All gone.

None to pass on to the children or the grandchildren now

Just the story

of our wedding at Cana,

and the rabbi who blessed us with wine.

Just the story.

But no wine.”

“Not to worry” responds his wife. “Not to worry.

As long as people come to his table,

there will be more.”

From:

Troeger, Thomas H: *10 Strategies for Preaching in a MultiMedia Culture*,
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996

That’s the thing with Jesus – just when you think you’ve got him pegged,
there’s more: more grace, compassion and mercy; unexpected solutions to
problems; and, an abundance of life.