

Sermon for 20th January 2019 Epiphany 3 The Wedding at Cana

One of the casualties of the Covid pandemic has been the cancellation or postponement of many weddings. At the moment weddings can only go ahead in extreme circumstances where marriage is considered urgent and only with 6 people in attendance. It will be wonderful when we can once again welcome more people to come and celebrate and more importantly witness a couple's special day as the congregation are a key part of the service as they answer that question "will you, the families and friends of - support and uphold them in their marriage now and in the years to come?" to which they answer "We will!" nice and confidently because they have practiced with me before the bride arrives! After the marriage ceremony generally the feasting begins and in biblical days the feasting might continue for days and that means plenty of food and drink.

Well in this famous gospel reading today the unthinkable happened. The wine ran out! Jesus is here as a guest along with his mother and his disciples. This potential failure in hospitality looked set to bring shame on the wedding hosts. Why, we may wonder, did the family of the bride and groom fail to produce enough wine? It seems it was customary for guests to bring wedding gifts in the form of food and drink to share the burden of providing for such a large group - does this indicate a lack of community support then in addition to their own lack of resources?

Whatever the reason, we see that although initially rather terse towards his mother (in our eyes anyway - imagine calling your mother 'woman' and think what might have happened to you next..) and seemingly hesitant to get involved, Jesus of course doesn't disappoint. Quietly he instructs the servants to fill the enormous water jars used for the Jewish rite of purification, washing of feet etc... and without going anywhere near the jars nor touching them, without any drama or important sounding words, the situation is saved. What was water in the jars and probably rather suspect water at that, is now not only wine but better wine than before. What's more, the shortfall has not only been made up - there is now an outrageous amount - six jars, each holding twenty to thirty gallons, enough for several village weddings! What a surprise!

It is the first of several key signs in John's gospel of Jesus' glory which is revealed to just a few people and they are not necessarily who we would expect. We might expect the bride or groom to play a key role here and in our culture I am sure the best man would know about it (!) but they

obliviously enjoy the wine. We might expect important guests to have inside information about where this good and abundant wine came from, but it is the servants interestingly who get this sneak peek at Jesus' glory in this story. It is presumably as Jesus would wish it to be.

One of the things Jesus says when asked to do something about the wine situation is words to the effect that his time had not come; when he says to his mother 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come'. John's gospel refers to 'Jesus' hour' quite a lot and we probably assume this refers to the hour when he will give up his life on the cross. As we look a bit more we could say this story is about timing generally - both good and bad.

It is bad timing that the wine ran out so soon - good timing that Jesus was there as a guest and able to not only provide a solution but an incredible solution and a sign of God's provision and abundance and an indication of just who this Jesus is - of his potential glory.

Mary's timing would appear not to be that good either though in this domestic situation - Jesus seems to think its bad timing as he says his time has not yet come.

Mary though, obviously a good Jewish mother who knows her son well, recognises that whenever her son was on the scene it was no ordinary time. Timing can be everything and not just in this scene but across John's Gospel. In fact there are two kinds of time which bring to life John's imagination. One is the kind of time with which we count and track the everyday events of our lives. It is time that is measured in minutes, seconds, hours and days. It is the time we spend standing in a queue, at the bus stop or the checkout, or waiting at a red light, sitting in a traffic jam. It is mundane, ordinary time and it beats on relentlessly until that time when we close our eyes and go to sleep. But there is another kind of time at play here, a divine kind of time, a time where all that is predictable fades and what emerges in its place is sheer possibility.

This is God's time, and it breaks through the ordinary canvas and clock of our lives at unexpected intervals to reveal a glimpse of the divine. (Remember Bishop Jo's sermon last week where she talks about the two worlds and which is more important to us).

This is what makes Christianity and walking with God so exciting - you never know what God might do next! So perhaps when Jesus speaks of his hour he

isn't speaking of a time and date on his calendar but talking about the time when God will reveal his glory through his cross, resurrection, and ascension, the time when God will be truly accessible to all, once and for all.

That time, that hour, Jesus says, has not yet come.

Or has it? Mary seems to know what time it is better than we might expect. For Mary seems not only to believe that her son Jesus can do something about this disastrous loss of blessing but expects him to.

And John the fourth evangelist seems to agree. After all John writes it is the third day of the wedding. The third day, again very significant, as in the third day he was raised from the dead. That's right because whenever there is need and Jesus is on the scene, resurrection and abundance are right round the corner.

And knowing this makes all the difference doesn't it. For every moment we live in Jesus, and Mary and John testify to this, the capacity for the divine to intervene is there. An ordinary hug can convey unbounded love and blessing. The smallest donation of food or money can tip the balance between scarcity and abundance. A simple act of kindness can make all the difference in the world. And a smile, shared at just the right time, can shed light into the darkest of places.

When Jesus is on the scene anything is possible. Because as John tells us in the first verses of this gospel, Jesus reveals in his own person God's grace upon grace. God is at work in everything we do, our occupations, relationships and family life to care for and redeem all the world. Imagine if we could really believe that God was with us in all our mundane jobs - our lives would be transformed wouldn't they?!

I wonder, can you think of some things in your life that have struck you as good or bad timing? What then you might reflect was the outcome afterwards for those occasions? If bad timing did they get resolved or even transformed? Even in the worst of times I have seen God's hand at work and that transformation is demonstrated through this story of the wedding at Cana today - a transformation of something that was not looking promising.

Imagine then if we open our hearts to God and trust - invite the miracle; especially if we think we cannot offer very much - you know the sort of

thing - we are not prayerful enough, loving enough, good enough, imagine if Jesus can take gallons of water and turn it into wine, what God could do with whatever small stuff we offer and make it wonderful for the kingdom.

Amen.