

Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Third Sunday of Epiphany

readings: [Genesis 14.17-20](#), [Revelation 19.6-10](#), [John 2.1-11](#)

21 January 2023

What is your impression of Jesus? An angry man wagging his finger at you for all the wrong things you have done? Or is it a man who had a great sense of the absurd, who had a wonderful sense of humour, a man who loved to be with people bringing a life giving, affirming and challenging message?

To share a meal in the middle East was and still is a sign of peace. King Melchizedek in our OT passage brings out bread and wine before he blesses Abram. Not just in the Bible but in our own experience, I believe that sharing of a common meal allows us to listen, to talk and maybe occasionally to challenge. I want us to hold that thought as we are in the week of prayer for Christian Unity. What might unity look like? So let us turn to our Gospel. Just think about what really happened at this wedding: Jesus created approximately 800 litres, say 1100 bottles of Chateau Cana AD30.

In John's gospel, this miracle is the first to be recorded, and it is placed immediately after Jesus chooses his disciples and they are there to see it. What a first lesson about being Good News for all, about transformed hopeful lives, that grow church and build community. For above all else, our passage today speaks of God's amazing grace. Let's turn to the Gospel passage, and think now of Mary, Jesus' mother. She says to him. 'They have no wine'.

In the society in which Jesus lived, this wasn't a simple miscalculation that could be solved by a quick dash to Tesco, Sainsbury's or Aldi! This was a huge issue of potential 'shame' for the host family.

Many societies around the world operate on the principle of 'honour' and 'shame'. A wedding feast would include the whole village, it would go on for anything up to 3 days. It was a massive affair, and if food or drink ran out, then the host family would suffer shame probably for years afterwards. Mary knew that, and of course Jesus knew that. She asked the question from the point of view of a concerned parent, but I believe she ended the encounter as a trusting disciple.

At first, Jesus appears to shrug off her request, with the response "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." For Jesus the primary motivation was to 'do the will of his Father'. Maybe at that point, just like you and me have to, he had to shoot up an arrow prayer... 'Father, Is this the time for a miracle, what do you want me to do?' Mary took a risk in asking him. This could have remained a private conversation, but something maybe in his eyes told her to persist. She tells the servants 'do whatever he tells you' So, Jesus tells the servants to go and fill the water jars (we must infer that they had to go and get the water from a spring or well nearby and fill the six stone water jars. That must have taken some time to do, but remember this feast was going on for much longer than a wedding breakfast here.

He then told them, 'draw some out and take it to the chief steward' and the miracle happened, the equivalent of 900 bottles of Chateau Cana AD 30 had been created. This was extravagance on a huge scale. This man risked causing total mayhem in that village. And when did it happen?: John notes that it was on 'the third day'. If you or I see 'third day' in the New Testament we need to take note.

Preach The third day implies resurrection power – a vision of the coming kingdom. Generosity and grace in far greater measure than we can currently see. But was this an isolated incident? No. As Michelle Guinness put it in a memorable talk, this is the man who took one boy's packed lunch and created a grand day out

for everybody – by the way it wasn't just 5,000 (that was just the men), it could have been upwards of 15,000 including women and children. Not only that as she put it, there was enough food left over for packed lunches afterwards for a week!

When he saw Zaccheus up a tree what did he say. 'Zaccheus – come to a meeting tonight' – no, 'lets party at your house today!' No where is it recorded whether Mrs Zaccheus was pleased! Indeed Jesus was so unlike the religious view of a holy man that the Pharisees referred to him as a glutton and a wino. [Mt 11:18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."' But wisdom is proved right by her actions."]

I think most of us will recognise that phariseeism in different forms has been alive and well for years in the church. Now, Jesus had just chosen his disciples, this was their first 'outing' with him, and what a first lesson in faith, risk and trust. A simple statement of truth, 'they've run out of wine', a word of command 'go fill the water jars' and a response in trust, 'draw some and take it to the chief steward'.

No doubt some on-lookers would have complained. 'what an extravagance!' much as Judas Iscariot complained at Mary pouring her life savings (a pint of pure perfume) over Jesus head – 'it could have been sold and the money given to the poor'. Jesus responded at that point 'the poor you will always have with you' and isn't that still true today? But all of our giving, all of our serving indeed all of our worship spring from our heart's understanding of all that Jesus has done for us. He gave everything, so that we might live for ever. In 2024 lets cultivate daily that spirit of thankfulness for God's mercy to us. As we do so, we will find our lives transformed. We will be those who naturally want to speak of the love of Christ. Through our witness and the Spirit's work, the church will grow, community will be built. This is not of us, but entirely as a result of God's grace. I didn't enter 2024 with any sense of delight with all that is going on in the world. 2024 definitely started where 2023 left off but as the poem written by Louise Minnie Haskins and quoted by King George VI in his Christmas broadcast in 1939 said: And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied: "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way." So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

2024 will have many challenges, most of which we don't perceive now, but with God's grace and through prayer and trust, we will have all his resources to face them. Let us also reach out to others who may not agree with us and eat with them. Who knows where those conversations may lead?

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