

John 2:1-11, Wedding at Cana

24 January 2021 Online

Father, we thank you for showing us yourself in our Lord Jesus. Open our eyes, our hearts and our minds, that we may know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly. Amen.

I'm focusing this morning on the reading from John's Gospel. John, you will remember, is quite unlike the other gospels: they are more concerned with giving a record of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. John does do that, but his main purpose is to help us to understand who Jesus really was, and is. He is interpreting the events of Jesus' life. He talks about the things Jesus did as 'signs', and at the end of the Gospel (Ch.20:30-31) he states clearly that 'Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these *are* written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah (the Christ), the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.'

So when we read John's Gospel, we are looking for these signs, and trying to work out what they mean. There are no empty words in John's Gospel, everything he puts in is there for a reason, and we have to uncover the layers of meaning for ourselves if we are to hear the full, glorious truth of his message. The wedding at Cana is really important because it is the very first of these 'signs' that Jesus gives.

One thing we need to clear up straight away is the misunderstanding that sometimes comes from Jesus' reply to his mother: The Good News translation just says "You must not tell me what to do," but John wrote "*Woman*, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." To our ears, to address his Mother as 'Woman' actually sounds a bit rude! But we need to note that in John's Gospel, Jesus uses the same form of address when he is on the cross and says to his mother and John that they are to be as mother and son to each other from now on. 'Woman, here is your son.' (19:26) It isn't a sign of annoyance, or lack of respect – it's just that

we don't have the equivalent words to translate the sense of the original. Someone has suggested that 'Lady' might be better. That also sounds odd to us, but you get the idea! It is title of respect.

Jesus is not annoyed with his mother. But perhaps he *is* suddenly made aware that *now* is the time to begin his public ministry. Imagine if you can: he is a grown man of 30. And only now is he making his appearance on the public stage. He has just been baptized by John, and has chosen his first disciples. How did he feel? Do you think he felt confident? Was he *absolutely sure* of what would happen? Was this a first bold stepping out in faith? The time to prove the truth of what he had experienced in his baptism - God telling him he was his Son? Try to imagine it. I suspect he was a little nervous.

We are told that there were six stone jars standing there, and Jesus tells the servants to fill them to the brim with water. That implies that they were empty. This is important. The stone jars were there for the Jewish purification ritual. But they stand empty. John is telling us that the Jewish faith of that time, with its preoccupation with dry ritual and rules was itself empty; it was dead. It was no longer the life-giving religion that God had intended it to be, no longer the way to a deep, satisfying relationship with God as Father.

Although Jesus seems to hesitate, and says that 'his hour has not yet come', Mary, the woman, knows that the hour of redemption is at hand. She tells the waiters *to do whatever Jesus says*; in so doing she symbolically tells all those who are waiting for salvation to turn to Jesus and do what he says. We want the wine of life, we want to taste something better than the daily drudgery which the world and cheap religion offer us.

Empty, ritualistic religion cannot satisfy our deepest longings. The stone water jars stood empty. Their original purpose dulled. But if, like the waiters, we do what Jesus asks, he changes things. He gives us wine for water, life for mere existence. We might have thought that life was OK, but it is nothing compared to what Jesus offers us.

The relationship he invites us into is more than we ever could have expected. It can make us drunk with gladness. It is like gallons and gallons of the finest wine. An endless supply of the best we could imagine.

As if to prove this point about the deadness of the old faith, the very next episode John tells us about is Jesus storming the Temple and driving out those who were profiteering from God.

So the lessons here for us are simple:

We need to look at our own faith and practice: is it empty and dead, or is it life-giving and full? Some people talk about 'churchianity' versus 'Christianity'. Are you just going through the motions? We can't even 'just' go to church at the moment, but are you praying regularly? Are your prayers from the heart, or just words that have become so familiar that they have lost their power? Are you allowing and expecting God to speak to you through the Bible? How alive is your faith today?

We need to look at Mary: she was aware of what was going on. *She had her eyes open to the situation around her. She saw the problem.* And what did she do? She took the problem straight to Jesus. She didn't get the answer she might have been expecting, but she just kept faith and helped others to see what they had to do. *She shared her confident faith in Jesus with others.*

And we need to look at the waiters: they had no idea what was going to happen, but they listened to Jesus and did just what he told them to do.

As a result, the whole situation was transformed.

And what Jesus did then, he still does today. Still he calls us into new life with him. Still today, as we turn to him, as we listen and obey, he changes things by the transforming power of his Holy Spirit.

Still he calls us to trust and obey, so that his new life may be lived in and through us, and his kingdom be brought ever closer. Amen.