

# SERMON 16 January 2022 8am/9am

## Abundant Blessing

**1 Corinthians 12:1-11**

**John 2:1-11**

**Sentence:** *Jesus revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. (John 2:11)*

**Collect:** God of feast and community, Jesus blessed a wedding, and turned water into wine. Let our lives bless you, and our work reveal the wine of your presence, through our Saviour Jesus Christ who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

*Wairua Tapu/Holy Spirit may you be present in this place, and in these words spoken and heard. Amen.*

When compared with other miracles of Jesus, the changing of water into wine looks, well, a little insipid. No demons have been cast out, no-one has been brought back to life, no blindness, or uncontrolled bleeding, or fevers have been healed. Not even the forgiveness of sin. No, today's miracle is, on the face of it, performed to allow a party to carry on in the manner to which the guests have become accustomed. However, material chosen for inclusion in the Gospel of John seems to have been chosen carefully, so it is worth us looking deeper into this passage.

The scene is set..."on the third day there was a wedding" (v.1) The third day, or Tuesday, was significant to Jewish people as it was the day in the Creation where God said twice that what had been created was good. So, it was considered a particularly blessed day, and as such, the ideal day for a couple to be married on. The reading says that Mary, Jesus, and the disciples were all invited, so it was possible that either the bride or the groom were family members of Mary and Jesus.

The party after a wedding often went on for several days, quite often a week. To run out of wine would have been the height of humiliation for the host. It is not surprising that Mary was concerned about there being no wine, especially if the host were a relative. What is interesting is Mary's assumption that Jesus would do something about the situation. Perhaps she thought that Jesus and His friends would have enough resources between them to go and purchase wine? This would be a feasible explanation; however, it is proved false by Mary's next actions. Just like when Mary, in faith, agreed to be the one to give birth to God's son, here she showed her faith again. She watched her child grow into a man, and she seemed to know that God had placed a special call on her son's life. From her faith in God, and God's son, she told the servants to "do whatever he tells you." (v.5) In asking the

servants to follow the instructions that Jesus might give them, it's like Mary knew that it was time for Jesus to begin His ministry of sharing God's love and power with humankind. She was so confident, that she said this despite Jesus having challenged her. "My hour is not yet come," said Jesus. This has clear resonances with the words of the prayer Jesus said just before His betrayal, "Father the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you..." (John 17:1b)

The next verse has an interesting detail – the six jars used to hold the water for the purification ritual were made of stone. Not clay, as most jars would have been made of at the time. Stone. These were very special jars. They would have taken a long time to make, with the person crafting them both shaping their outside and hollowing out the inside. They were enormous, each holding gallons of water. These were jars worthy of holding the product of Jesus' first miracle.

The instructions which Jesus gave the servants were not difficult: fill the jars with water, then draw some out for the chief steward to taste. The wine was so good, that the chief steward went to interrupt the groom from celebrating to congratulate him on reserving the best wine for later, despite the likelihood those drinking it might be too drunk to appreciate it. Not only was the wine of the best quality imaginable, but it was also plentiful – there were six enormous jars of this wine available for the party.

The result of Jesus revealing His glory through this miracle, was that the disciples believed in Him. This was, after all, the first time Jesus had done something that was only explained by having God's power. The passage ends with the details of where Jesus, Mary, and the disciples went to next.

Water to wine – the transforming nature of Jesus is to make the ordinary, extraordinary. Over and over, Jesus took the seemingly mundane and unimportant and glorified them. He did not choose His disciples from the leaders and respected, instead He chose the ordinary, and in at least one case, the least respected. He spent time with the outcasts, healed those who were of a despised nationality or occupation, and even treated women as His equal. He upended everyone's expectation of what God's Messiah would do and be.

Water to wine – the transforming nature of Jesus is expressed with abundant generosity. In John 10 Jesus says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (v. 10b). God is not a Scrooge, nor a Grinch. Of course, the ultimate act of generosity by Jesus was to offer His very life for humankind. This act of generosity is described by Malcolm Guite in his poem *Epiphany at Cana*:

*Here's an epiphany to have and hold,  
A truth that you can taste upon the tongue,*

*No distant shrines and canopies of gold  
Or ladders to be clambered rung by rung,  
But here and now, amidst your daily living,  
Where you can taste and touch and feel and see,  
The spring of love, the fount of all forgiving,  
Flows when you need it, rich, abundant, free.*

*Better than waters of some outer weeping,  
That leave you still with all your hidden sin,  
Here is a vintage richer for the keeping  
That works its transformation from within.  
'What price?' you ask me, as we raise the glass,  
'It cost our Saviour everything he has.'*

<https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/tag/wedding-at-cana/>

Water to wine – in preparing the Eucharistic sacraments, the priest adds a little water to the wine in the chalice. Some think that this is representative of the mix of blood and water which flowed when the side of Jesus was pierced as He hung on the cross. Others refer to the less gruesome and much more mundane Roman practice of adding water to wine to make it more palatable to drink. However, traditions from as early as the fourth century speak to symbolism which could be connected to this first miracle of Jesus. Water is a symbol of the ordinary, of humanity. Wine is a symbol of the blood of Jesus, the divine. By mixing both, the priest is metaphorically mixing humanity and the divine: connecting us to Jesus, and Jesus to us. Furthermore, it is a symbol of us connecting with each other through Jesus. Therefore, it is a symbol of our unity with God and with each other.

Jesus wants each of us to experience God's love in abundance. The question is: are you ready to receive it?

*Raewyn Berkahn*