

John 2: 1–11: The Wedding at Cana

Weddings are life-affirming, joyous occasions. The celebration of the union between two people plunges us into our humanity and its deepest need to love and be loved. This is why people dress up, rejoice, have fun and want to sing. There is something effervescent about weddings; the love that two people have for each other fizzes out among the whole company of guests to bond them all together.

Weddings of late have shrunk. In October, Edmund and myself were present at two weddings where the guests numbered 15 in total. Did this detract from the joy of the occasion? No, in fact it made the occasion more meaningful because the people getting married just wanted to get married, irrespective of the restrictions. The couples wanted to celebrate their love. The numbers didn't matter.

A wedding is an ideal venue for Jesus to reveal who he is and what he has come to do – to deepen hope, to enable people to grow in forgiveness, tenderness, kindness and compassion. A

wedding is a covenant of love. Jesus came to reveal the covenant of God's love with his people.

Prior to attending the wedding, Jesus has chosen five companions from Galilee. These men were to be sent out to announce the love of God in Jesus. Important work. You would imagine that Jesus would have initiated a programme of Continuing Ministerial Education, beginning with a spiritual experience in the desert and followed up by in-depth learning of the Torah, the Scriptures and the Prophets. Instead, Jesus takes his new disciples to a wedding. It is here that these men begin their journey of faith. At the time, weddings lasted for a week. They were designed for a much wider community than near family and friends. Often, the whole village would take part. In Aramaic, the word for 'wedding feast' has the same roots as the word for 'drink' – a sign that weddings were times of revelry. The theology of the disciples would have begun with blurred edges. They would, from the start, have understood that Jesus was for all – for the whole community from the weakest to the strongest – and learned that to be with Jesus was to be plunged into the depths of humanity.

In this story Jesus performs a miracle. He turns water into wine. Just to let you know, you can try this at home but it rarely works.

People get hung up on the miraculous element of this story. Maybe we can see beyond the water and wine into what is really being done? If we take water to represent ordinariness, part of the daily need, and wine to represent extraordinariness, rejoicing, luxury – perhaps we can see that in this miracle, Jesus is offering the transformation of our lives and experiences – transforming the dullness of duty into a new passion of love for God and others. This transformation includes the transformation of our religious experience as the disciples were to find out.

The wedding runs out of wine. A crisis. A humiliation for the married couple, unable to provide enough wine for their guests. An embarrassment. Mary intercedes with Jesus for the poor and humiliated and he responds, literally: *‘Woman, what is there between you and me?’* An Aramaic way of expressing a refusal to act. His hour has not yet come.

Mary tells the servants to *‘Do whatever he tells you.’*

Mary is present at the start of Jesus' public ministry. She knows of his love for the humble and weak. She knows he will do something.

In this context, Jesus question '*What is there between you and me?*' is more of an announcement. He needs to separate from Mary and his family to announce God's love to the people of Israel. This mission will lead to the 'hour' of the cross where the new wine of divine love will be poured out. Mary will again be present.

Jesus tells the servants to fill six huge jars with water. They must have taken some time to fill and many buckets. The servants – humble, trusting and hard-working – have faith in Jesus. What, I wonder, was their reaction when they discovered the water had turned into wine? Jesus uses the faith of his humble servants to do beautiful things. The wine is of the best quality and there is gallons and gallons available. Humans would be far more cautious about providing this much wine but God does things differently, abundantly. God loves us and wants to give us abundant life and joy, growing and stretching us to receive more and more of him.

The abundance of wine was a sign that the Messianic age had arrived.

The author of the Gospel includes important details. We are told that this wedding happens on 'the third day'; the day of Resurrection, of new life. The day of fulfilment. The Sabbath Day, the day of rest. The day that echoes the final day when God will be all in all. The Day of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb to which we are all invited.

As Jesus explains in one of his parables, the Kingdom of God is like a wedding feast where those who were invited – the good, the great and the handsome – refused to come because they were too busy with short-term projects. The invitation is extended to 'the poor, the lame and the blind' – people hungry for relationship and affirmation. They come for love and community. The Church should and does attract people hungry for love and community. No need, no party.

Jesus came to renew all things, as this miracle makes clear. He came to transform our fragmented humanity into a new unity, just like he changed the water into wine.

To conclude, Jesus brought his disciples to a wedding feast to reveal to them and to us our deepest thirst – our desire to love and be loved. Jesus affirms that we are called to celebrate God's goodness to us. This is why we should celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, Easter, births, even deaths and of course, the Eucharist. We are called to live these times when the God of love is especially present to us, calling us to a deeper hope of the final celebration at the end of the age. Despite how life can feel and despite the circumstances in which we can find ourselves, we are all made for happiness and fullness of joy. One of the greatest accolades you can give to a person is that they enjoy the life that God has given to them. Amen.