

## Epiphany 2 John 2:1-11

As we move into the first season of Ordinary Time in the Church year let's recap Jesus' life so far – birth, Wise Men, teenager in the temple, baptism and start of ministry. Today we focus on the next big event, Jesus' 1<sup>st</sup> miracle.

As John tells the story in his gospel, Jesus and his disciples are invited to the wedding in Cana only days after Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan. He has only known the disciples for about three days and he has not performed any miraculous signs as yet. His first miracle will take place in a quiet backwater town, with nothing special about it at all. It's a domestic scene, a family wedding. The family are probably what we would recognise as normal people. It could just as well have happened here.

Culturally, weddings in the middle east haven't changed much and they are not so much a one day event but rather they take many days of preparation and then many days for the wedding rituals themselves. These wedding days consist of celebration, feasting and drinking. Family, close and extended, are invited along with friends and indeed all members of the community welcome to share the joy and wish the newlyweds well.

If you go to a wedding these days here in Australia you probably wouldn't be surprised if you had to buy your own drinks from a hotel bar. But in the days of this wedding in Galilee, the expectation was that the bride's family would provide food and wine enough for five days of feasting and drinking. It would have been a terrible breach of hospitality to fail to provide for their guests and being a small village, everyone would have remembered the failure for years to come and it might have blighted the couple's reputation before their new life together had really begun. Mary wanted to help them out of this awful situation.

"What concern is that to me?" says Jesus, when she tells him. And what concern is it to God that a small-town wedding catering arrangement has gone wrong? Let's face it, there are bigger things going on in the world. There are people suffering in poverty and sickness; there's crime and immorality all around; natural disasters blighting people's lives. Why does God care about one family who will be embarrassed by a catering blunder? Why would Jesus choose this time to reveal his glory in the first of his miraculous signs?

Firstly, as Matthew tells us in his gospel, our God is aware of every sparrow and feeds them; he clothes the fields with beautiful flowers. God is involved with every detail of the world around us. And will he not much more clothe us and feed us? Our God chooses to get involved in our lives – no job too big or too small. If only we have faith to believe it and ask. It's a point Jesus reiterates over and over again, "ask and you shall receive" and yet we so often so timid in our asking.

We should also notice that God often provides his greatest blessings, as in today's gospel reading, when we have reached the end of what we can provide for ourselves and finally recognise our need for him. Mary recognized the need and recognized that Jesus can do something to relieve that need. She also has faith that her son, God's son, will not fail the friends who have invited him to their wedding feast. When he asks the servants to fill the six stone jars with water, the ladleful which is then taken to the steward contains fine wine.

In Jewish thought, wine was often used as a metaphor for joy. There was a saying that "without wine there is no joy". So, running out of wine becomes a symbol for those times when life becomes anything but joyous. And, later in John's gospel, Jesus makes clear his mission is to ensure that his joy might be in us and our joy might be complete.

Therefore transforming water used for ritual cleansing into wine also becomes a symbol, of the new covenant bringing life to the old – not replacing it but transforming it. The world is concerned with external things: making the right impression, having the right catering and wearing the right clothes. But God is concerned with things being right on the inside: God wants to forgive our sins; to give us the gift of eternal life and to encourage us to start living that life to the full right now. God wants to transform us from people of the world to people of the Kingdom. And to do this we must first recognise that we cannot do this in our own strength, as Mary recognised that God had the answers, no one else, at the wedding in Cana.

So, Jesus saved face for his family friends by providing wine to continue the wedding celebrations. He met their immediate need, but he went further. He didn't provide just enough, and he didn't provide just a reasonable quality wine. He provided one hundred and twenty gallons of such superior wine that the steward makes the comment "you have kept the good wine until now". Jesus breaks with tradition in order to provide abundantly for his friends and this reflects his Father's desire to give abundant blessings to his people.

Receiving the blessing is linked here, and elsewhere, to obedience to God's commands. Jesus' primary command is to love one another as he has loved us. As he loved us first, he asks us to allow his love to overflow from us to bless each other and our community as we build the kingdom here on earth.

God wants us to taste the fine wine of abundant blessings – in the words of the Psalmist "taste and see how good the Lord is". We can do this within our Church family through worship and study and fellowship together and we are, as a Church, entrusted with a mission to share that blessing – to share this joy – with our community. But God also invites us individually to taste and see. Perhaps you're began coming to Church as a result of an invitation, perhaps you've been blessed and have some joy to share, or perhaps you've reached the end of what you can do for yourself and you want to see what the Lord has to offer.

During the service this morning, as we do every week, we will be invited to taste his body and blood in the bread and wine, and be reminded that he died so that our sins can be forgiven and we can be reconciled with God – the greatest blessing.

We invite each other, our friends and families and the people of our community to:  
"Come in! Taste and see how good the Lord is."

Let us also accept that invitation for ourselves.