

## THE WEDDING AT CANA

[2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF THE YEAR; ISAIAH 62:1-5, PSALM 36:5-10, 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-12, JOHN 2:1-11]

The wedding at Cana... or should I call it the teenagers' text. There are certainly many elements that would appeal to the average teenager of today. Think for a moment of how Jesus addresses his mother, when she asks him to sort out the wine shortage: "Woman, what does this have to do with me?" Just picture it... Mother asks her child to clean its room, child responds with: "Woman, what does this have to do with me?" Not only a biblical response but a Christological one too! Or think for a moment of the context, a wedding feast. Not only is Jesus at a party but he produced six stone water jars of wine for the party. Each stone jar would have held about 100 liters of water. That works out to be 600 liters of wine... and we think binge drinking is bad in our time!

Let me stop there before all the parents revolt and I lose my job here as a Youth Pastor! In reality, this story from John's Gospel is all about transformation. The central image is the transformation of water into wine, which on the surface, at least, is what the story is all about. When the host runs out of wine, Jesus provides an extravagant abundance. But, this is not some cheap and nasty 'box wine'. No. Jesus provides a Diemmersfontein Pinotage, or you could substitute this with your own favorite wine. The point is Jesus provided plenty quality wine.

So what are we to make of this miracle? Our Modern or Post Modern minds are often reluctant to accept incidents like these that appear to defy the laws of nature. We may prefer to reason, as one commentator did, that Jesus merely topped up the existing wine with water. Those present only thought it was better wine because of radiant personality of Jesus who had arrived 'late'.

Perhaps we should begin by asking what we mean by the word miracle. How do we understand this term compared to how John and other Biblical writers would have comprehended it? It may be helpful to remember that 'laws of nature' is a modern scientific concept. Albert Nolan reminds us that John would have known nothing about nature, let alone the laws of nature. The world is God's creation and whatever happens in the world, ordinary or extraordinary, is part of God's providence. The biblical writers do not divide events into natural and supernatural. Therefore, a miracle in the Bible is an unusual event which has been understood as an unusual act of God. Certain acts of God are called miracles or wonders because of their ability to astonish and surprise us, their ability to make us marvel and wonder. In this way, C.S. Lewis has referred to the incarnation, which we have just celebrated, as 'The Grand Miracle'.

Interestingly, the writer of John's Gospel does not refer to this incident as a miracle, but rather calls it a sign. Generally a sign draws our attention away from itself to something else. Take road signs for example. Think of a black exclamation mark on a white triangle, with a red border. This is a general warning sign. In this country it could mean anything from 'watch out for potholes' to 'beware of hijackings'! The point is that we would be silly to stare at such a sign, rather than looking for that which has necessitated the sign. So what actually happened at that wedding feast in Cana? I don't know, nor do I think knowing is critical for our understanding of the story. The Miracle of the water turning into wine is merely the surface story, it is a sign. So if it is a sign, what does it point us to?

There may be many layered interpretations that John wishes to communicate. Let us discuss one of the more popular possibilities. William Barclay, in his commentary, provides us with some interesting notes on the stone water jars or firkins. Firstly, these containers were used for the Jewish purifying ceremonies; the washing of feet or hands. Secondly, we are told that there are six jars in total. But according to the Jews, as a number, six is incomplete, unfinished and imperfect. Seven is the number that signifies absolute completeness and perfection. Therefore Barclay argues the six stone water jars stand for all the imperfections of the Jewish law with its legalistic practices. The new wine signifies the Gospel of Grace. Jesus, by his coming, turned the imperfection of the Jewish Religious system into the perfection of Grace.

So what could this story mean for us as Christians, as those who claim to have received that Gospel of grace? The sad reality is that many Christians are more comfortable with a religion closer to that practiced by the Jews during the time of Jesus, with all its laws; its propensity to be an exclusive club. We as Anglicans are particularly prone to falling into the trap of Religious superiority and ritual emptiness. It is so easy to consider oneself better, more intellectual or thoughtful than some 'fanatic' down the road. I have a deep love for our liturgical style of worship, yet we need to acknowledge that it can easily become a platform for merely repeating empty words; a religion devoid of real substance!

I recently came across the etymology or origin of the word religion: “The word religion derives from Latin ligare (to tie or to bind, as in 'ligament'). It is rather sad and ironic that religion’s original meaning, to bind has become its exact opposite. I believe that we are called to reclaim that original meaning. We are, after all, wounded, disconnected and fragmented people who need to be reconnected, put back together with God, with one another, reintegrated within ourselves, reconnected to the world we are part of!

It is too easy to be cynical in this world, to give up hope! Fatalism seems to be the prevailing attitude of most people, most of the time. It finds expression in statements like “Nothing can be done about it.” “You can’t change the world.” “You must be practical and realistic.” Few of us are willing to believe that good transformation is possible, let alone pursue it for ourselves and our context. In my short experience of this life, transformation is a process that seldom excludes suffering... the cross! It may be helpful, at this point to return to Jesus’ response to Mary. He concludes with the words: “My hour has not yet come.” This is not the only time that Jesus uses this phrase in the Gospel of John, and always it is a reference to the cross. Therefore, the author is inviting us to ponder the mystery of the cross right at the beginning of his Gospel! Indeed, I believe that the Gospel writer is reminding us that to be Christians in this world will require that we carry a ‘cross’ from time to time in the process of transformation!

At the end of this text we are told that the disciples believed in him, that being Christ. Are we courageous enough to believe in Christ, to take on that responsibility and allow ourselves to be transformed!? At communion as we receive a wafer, Ron will say: “The Body of Christ”. Those words refer not only to the wafer that becomes for us the body of Christ. Those words are said also to us, for we are indeed the body of Christ in the World!!