

The Third Sunday of Epiphany

Collect: Almighty God, whose Son revealed in signs and miracles the wonder of your saving presence: renew your people with your heavenly grace, and in all our weakness sustain us by your mighty power; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Genesis 14.17–20: After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). ¹⁸And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. ¹⁹He blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; ²⁰and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!' And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything.

Psalm 128

- ¹ Blessed are all those who fear the Lord,
and walk in his ways.
- ² You shall eat the fruit of the toil of your hands;
it shall go well with you, and happy shall you be.
- ³ Your wife within your house
shall be like a fruitful vine;
your children round your table,
like fresh olive branches.
- ⁴ Thus shall the one be blest
who fears the Lord.
- ⁵ The Lord from out of Zion bless you,
that you may see Jerusalem in prosperity
all the days of your life.
- ⁶ May you see your children's children,
and may there be peace upon Israel.

Gospel: John 2.1–11: On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' ⁴And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' ⁵His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' ⁶Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. ⁹When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Reflection by Reverend Keir Dow:

The water into wine story is probably one of the best-known miracles of Jesus. It is one of my personal favourite acts of Jesus. It has been used as an argument against teetotalism and sobriety for many generations. "Are you sure you should be drinking this much wine?" "Oh yes, Jesus set the example for us at the wedding in Cana" - all the while happily ignoring the numerous times drunkenness is mentioned as a sin in the Bible.

Like with other parts of the bible, we are challenged to draw out the meaning in the text. But did John write this into his gospel in order to excuse slightly sozzled drinkers through the ages? I doubt that very much.

Is this reading telling us of the importance of marriage? Is it that Jesus saw the significance of such a union before God and therefore the place he should perform his first sign or miracle? We still hear the mention of this story in the opening lines of the marriage service which tells us that it can often be seen in that way.

Or does the wine represent 'Our lives of faith'? There will be times when our lives feel like the "wine is running out". In this way, when our faith is running out Jesus will restore us as new wine and just like at the wedding in Cana this wine will be the best?

All of these are valuable messages and they speak to us at the time we need them. The wonder of these messages lies in the context in which we read them.

With this in mind, I want to spend a moment to focus on Mary in the story. Until I went to ministry training college I had not really considered feminist theology. The fact the Jesus' mother was there both at the wedding and also in John's account are noteworthy. Mary being at the wedding suggests that it was a close family member. Weddings at this time in history would have lasted at least a few days and even up to a week. Running out of wine at a modern day wedding may bring a little embarrassment but the social stigma of running out of wine in biblical times would have been significant. Some people would've suggested that the marriage did not please God and the running out of wine would've brought shame and dishonour on the whole family. Mary was keen to do something about this. We don't know whose wedding it was but it was clearly someone significant in Mary's life.

But why does she get a mention in the retelling in John's Gospel. John tells of the women around Jesus as key figures and active in their roles. It is in John's Gospel that we hear about the Jesus and the Samaritan women and of Martha's part in the story of raising Lazarus. So Jesus' mother Mary being a key figure in the story is not completely unusual in John.

But Jesus turning water into wine is the first public signs of Jesus' divinity but when his mother asks him to do something Jesus refuses. He says, "My time has not yet come". Does this strategy of Jesus work when your mother wanted you to do something? "Stop playing on the computer and go and tidy your room." "Sorry Mother, my time is not yet come!" Mary clearly knew of Jesus' ability and Power and want him to do something. Is this because she wants the Wedding to go well? Or does she know that it is time for Jesus to start his mission on Earth?

Jesus' response and refusal are ignored, and Mary instructed the servants to do what Jesus said. This gives us a glimpse of the human that Jesus was. What a great example of Jesus' humanity, doing what his mother told him. How many of us have thought about Jesus in this way? What was it like for him growing up? Learning to talk, toilet training, going through puberty? We can easily marvel and wonder at Jesus the divine, but we must also remember that Jesus was fully human. He experienced all of the joy and the sadness that is human life.

We don't know if Mary knew that this act of sorting out the wine for this wedding was going to lead to Jesus fulfilling his mission on earth and his ultimate sacrifice for humanity or whether she just wanted to spare the shame of those involved at the wedding. We do know that this act at the wedding in Cana was the start of Jesus' ministry on earth which Jesus knew would ultimately lead to his crucifixion and his resurrection.

John's writing here indicates that it was Mary who lit the touch paper of Jesus' Ministry. And what started in Cana at that wedding, the three years of Jesus' ministry on Earth, remains with us to this day. Thank you Mary. Amen.