

SERMON – 19/1/25
'The Wedding at Cana'

John 2:1-11

"Jesus' mother said to Him 'They have no more wine.'" (John 2:3)

In this season of Epiphany the big question for us is whether we are able to discern how God is at work around us and within us and how we respond to what the Lord reveals of Himself to us. A fortnight ago we were marvelling at the star that led the magi from afar to the newborn Christ when many who were much closer in miles and in cultural background missed the significance of it. Last Sunday we saw how the preaching of John the Baptist brought many to repentance and faith while others resolutely closed their ears and actively rejected the message.

In our reading this morning, the well-known but elusive story of the turning of water into wine, there are again some who see and know what Jesus has done, who see His glory and put their faith in Him, while others simply wonder where such fine wine has come from and carry on partying, oblivious to the fact that the Son of God was standing in their midst, because His time had not yet come.

So let's begin by noticing a few things about what happens here. John's Gospel takes us through the story of Jesus' life in a rather different way than Matthew, Mark and Luke do, so when he begins this account with the words, 'On the third day,' it is less a description of the passing of time or a common way of indicating that the wedding probably took place on the day after the Sabbath when everything had been paused and a new week was beginning - you had finished up what you were doing on Friday, you had rested on Saturday and now this was the third day, the start of something new - and more significantly a pointer ahead to that other 'third day' when Jesus rose again from the dead after His work was finished on Friday at Calvary and He had rested in the tomb on the Sabbath. So in John's telling of the Gospel, (and neither Matthew, Mark nor Luke include it in their accounts of Jesus' life and work) this miracle-blessed wedding when Jesus tells His mother 'My time has not yet come' is a

foretaste (for those who will discern it) of what will happen when His time *does* come.

John describes it here as the 'first sign' which was an epiphany, a revelation of Christ's glory, the first in fact of what will be seven signs in the ensuing chapters, milestones through his unfolding account – the healing of a nobleman's son, the healing of the crippled man at the pool, the feeding of the 5000, the walking on the water, the healing of the blind man and the raising of Lazarus from the grave.

The clues are dangled tantalisingly. This miracle of making water into wine is just to whet our appetites – His time has *not* yet come, hardly anyone is aware of what has actually happened here, in comparison to what will unfold eventually, this is a day of small things. The question for us is whether it will prepare us to draw a bit closer and take Jesus a bit more seriously or whether we will just dismiss it as a bit of a curiosity and move sceptically on to the next story?

Just as Herod the Great missed the significance of the star the magi followed, so his son, Herod the Tetrarch, missed the significance of John the Baptist's call to repentance and so the wedding guests at Cana missed the significance of the fine wine that was served to them. What are we missing, I wonder? Are you willing to explore more deeply what Jesus may be revealing of Himself here? Are you willing to let the Gospel lead you beyond itself to the One who died and was buried and rose again the third day?

Secondly, let me encourage you to ponder just what actually takes place in this extraordinary miracle. It starts with six stone water jars used for ritual washing. But take note of this – they are huge. Each one of them holds between 80 and 100 litres, 20 to 30 gallons. When we think about this miracle most of us probably get stuck on the question of how water could possibly be transformed into wine and so we fail to take in the sheer quantities. We are particularly told that the jars were 'filled to the brim' with water, so we're talking a total of four to five hundred litres, 120-180 gallons, which is enough for the best part of 1000 bottles of wine. And as the master of the banquet

discovers to his amazement these stone jars are not full of water as expected, not even just full of wine but full of the very finest of wine, the kind that would normally have been served for the first toasts, not once the party was in full swing.

We need to recognise and be open to the fact that when Jesus brings transformation it is utterly beyond our imagining. Christ did not come to institute ritual or ceremonial but to leave that kind of thing completely in the shadows. We were thinking last Sunday about the blessings that water brings us – the ability to clean what is dirty, the ability to bring refreshment and satisfaction, the ability to sustain life – but here Jesus takes water to a whole new level, not just turning it into wine but the very finest tasting wine that anyone had ever experienced and offering that to us not as an end in itself but as a pointer to life in all its fulness, the new wine of the Kingdom that is fellowship for you and me with God the Almighty and Eternal, the Creator of the ends of the universe. Are you willing to let the Gospel open your eyes to a whole new dimension of life and to acknowledge (in the words of the apostle Paul to the Ephesians) that God is “able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.” (Eph.3:20)

Which leads me to one apparently insignificant little clue in this morning's reading that reveals something really important about Christ to us and which I think helps us to consider our response to Him not just today but every day. It's in the seemingly throwaway statement by Jesus' mother that appears to set the whole episode in motion. 'They have no more wine.' Now it would be an interesting drama-class type exercise to go round the room and ask what lies behind that statement and what tone was in Mary's voice as she said it. I can imagine a whole range of possibilities.

Perhaps it was one of resignation - 'They have no more wine' – as if to say, Come on son, that's the party over, we may as well head home now. Or maybe Mary, possibly a relative of the family, was in a panic - 'They have no more wine' – oh how awful for them, what are the in-laws going to say, we've got to do something, this is a disaster. It could even have been said in the kind of tone that relatives sometimes use with 'that side of the

family' - with raised eyebrows and a knowing look: 'They have no more wine.' Typical, I might have known they would mess this up.

But Jesus' response seems to indicate that He heard His mother's comment almost as a prayer - 'They have no more wine.' Almost a request, built on the knowledge she uniquely had of Him as the One who was conceived within her by the Holy Spirit, that He should not only ask His heavenly Father to act but that now would be an opportune time for Him to reveal Himself as the Father's Son.

Yet, as I read it this morning I hear it differently, and I hear in it a challenge to my own praying. How often do I wrestle over what to pray for a certain person or in a certain situation as if it is for me to tell God what to do and to map out the ideal way ahead when what I should be doing is simply bringing the person or the situation before the Saviour and leaving it there: 'They have no more wine.' End of prayer. Lord, it's Liz. Or God, it's Dave. Or, Father – the Middle East.

If you read through John's Gospel looking at the seven signs that reveal Jesus' glory you will see clearly that in every case it is Jesus Himself who is in charge. He is not bounced into action by circumstances or by the requests of those who come to Him. In each case He is revealing something of Himself and of His eternal purposes.

So, as we step out into a new year and particularly as we begin to shape the ministry and mission of Kinross-shire Parish Church, what is this story to say to us and to ask of us at this time? As we ask God in Christ this Epiphany to reveal Himself and His purposes to us, I hear it as a reminder that we are people of the third day, resurrection people, people who are called to follow Jesus on an extraordinary journey into new life. I hear it as a call to faith that nothing is impossible with God – what we are about is so much more than our rituals and ceremonies and traditions, and in Jesus' hands even something as ordinary as water can be not just as complex as wine but the very best of wine, even someone as ordinary as you or me can be used in the service of the Kingdom, even a place and time as ordinary as ours can be

the place and time of God's revelation. This very moment shines with eternal promise, for I hear this story as a call to us simply to put ourselves and our circumstances entirely in Christ's hands and just to see what God will reveal.

Here we are, Lord. This is our situation. Now, what will you do in us and with us and through us?

"Jesus' mother said to Him 'They have no more wine.'" Amen.