

# The wedding at Cana ...

*... live as if every day were a feast day*

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*A reflection given on the Second Sunday of Epiphany, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2022 – by the Vicar the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster*

*John 2:1-11*

I wonder, are you a glass half-empty person or a glass half-full person? Or are you more like my son: he says, "Well, it all depends on whether you're filling the glass or draining it." But the glass half-empty or half-full image - it may be cliché - but it still makes a good point about how we tend to look at the world. Is your outlook basically positive or negative? Do you tend to see the good in others and in the world around you, or do you expect the worst? Whatever your basic disposition, the way you react to very specific circumstances may reflect how you feel about the world at a much deeper level.

Many years ago there was a journalist called Martin Harris who described himself as by nature an atheist and by profession a cynic, who found himself diagnosed with terminal cancer. And he started to have second thoughts about Christianity.

Confronted by his mortality, he had to decide whether to align himself with the rationalist atheist standing on the edge (as he put it) of a cooling and indifferent universe, or rather to see significance in the love of his wife and children and his instinct to reach out to others as a way of displacing his own fear. In the end, he opted to live as though the universe was ultimately friendly and hospitable, rather than impersonal or even hostile.

And in today's Gospel reading, we are presented with a wonderful image of Jesus Christ as the one who draws out from the depths of creation its latent hospitality and abundance. It's a story about the glass not just being half-full but overflowing and running down the sides until your feet get wet. The scene is a wedding, and in the Bible that always speaks of the Kingdom of God, of a world healed and fulfilled, set free from fear and death and filled with love and communion: at a wedding opposites come together; a new community is formed; the world is made new as a new family comes into being; it speaks of harmony, of fertility and celebration, all the good things which life in this earth has to offer.

But at this wedding, disaster beckons. They have run out of wine. The bride and groom are blissfully unaware. But if there is no wine to help the celebration along, there will be deep embarrassment and social disgrace. And Jesus, although at first he seems reluctant to get involved, comes to the rescue, turning water in the ceremonial water jars into wine. And not just any old wine. This is the finest Première Cru Châteauneuf Du Pape! The steward is amazed at its quality. And not just a few bottles to eke out and save face at the reception: there are six stone water jars, each holding 20 or 30 gallons! So that's enough wine to keep the whole village partying until the middle of next month. It's a picture of abundance and celebration.

In the Old Testament and in other early Jewish texts, the reign of the Messiah is often associated with a time of abundance, with the earth yielding its harvest. The Prophet Amos looks forward to a time when the mountain shall drift sweet wine and all the Hills shall flow with it. Another writer says that when the Messiah comes, every vine shall grow a thousand branches and every branch shall grow 10 clusters of grapes, and every grape will yield 100 gallons of wine.

So when Jesus turns up at a wedding feast and produces hundreds of gallons of wine, the message is clear: the Messiah has arrived and God's new age has dawned; the renewal of all creation.

And we see here a more fundamental point: God's creation is good and is made to be fertile and abundant; God himself is generous so that we don't need to be afraid of scarcity or shortage of the things that we really need; the Earth itself is hospitable and spacious and is a treasury for all. But because of human greed and hardheartedness, these truths are obscured; because of human greed and hardheartedness, there are poor and marginalised people everywhere who cannot feed their children; because of human greed and hardheartedness, there is often a fear of shortage and a compulsion to compete for resources and an anxiety that others may get there before us. And it takes the appearance of the Messiah to remind us of the true nature of things. It takes a resurrection (and remember, this story starts with the phrase, 'on the third day there was a wedding in Cana, Galilee' - where have you heard that phrase 'on the third day' before?) - It takes a resurrection to remind us that there are no boundaries; that if death can be defeated, then there is no limit to anything, if only we can reflect the open-handed generosity of God himself.

So this morning, draw near with faith; the table is always open; there is always bread and wine; come and eat and be satisfied; and drink and have your thirst quenched; our God is generous; He knows what you need.

So do not be anxious or afraid: trust in his goodness; trust in his provision; trust in his love for each one of you; and come, sit down and take your fill; and live as if every day were a feast day, a day of abundance and generosity; when the good things God gives us to enjoy are shared and made available for all; when we respond to the glory of Jesus, the Messiah.

## Reading Texts

John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup> Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup> When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' <sup>6</sup> Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. <sup>9</sup> When 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 <sup>10</sup> and 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.' <sup>11</sup> Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.