

Water and Wine

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai, Sunday 17 January 2016

John 2:1-11
[MW16-01]

"You tell him!"

"No. You tell him!"

"It's not my fault."

"What are we going to do?"

"Bunch of boozers! They've only come for the wine."

"It'll spoil the wedding."

"Where'd it all go anyway?"

"The family's too cheap."

"No. It's his fault. That stuck up steward. He didn't order enough."

"Maybe we could just use water?"

They've already drunk so much perhaps they wouldn't notice ...?"

A quiet, serene woman approaches the group of servants. "Excuse me. I couldn't help overhearing. Is there a problem?"

"You could say that. We appear to have run out of wine. It's so early in the celebrations too. We just don't understand it. There's going to be big trouble! We're just about to draw lots to see who's going to tell the steward."

"Give me a moment," the lady says. "Let me speak to my son."

"Is he a wine merchant? Does he have a storehouse full of wine? Vinegar even!"

"Something like that," the woman smiles.

Out the front the party is in full swing

- everyone is having a good time, oblivious to the trouble out the back
- the steward is very pleased with how it's all going
it will be good for his status and career
- out the back, sheer panic - disaster is just moments away!

Enter the mother of Jesus: "Son, they've run out of wine"

- there's something in the look in her eye, the tilt of her head

I wondered if perhaps a possible title or 'motto' for this incident could be something like:

- 'Mothers can get their sons to do anything'
or maybe 'Mother knows best'

Jesus says this is hardly the time or the place,

- this is not an appropriate situation to launch out into the world
- his mother seems to be saying: what better way, what better time,
what better place, what better way than this?
- Jesus' mother believes her son can and should do something about the lack of wine
and like all good mothers she continues to trust her son's ability
and leaves the initiative with him

After saying that he doesn't think it's his time, Jesus does not say or do anything.

- his mother quietly moves things along, saying to the servants:
"Whatever he tells you, do it."

There could be a huge and involved theological discussion here

- but it seems mother does indeed know best
and Jesus follows her lead

Jesus glances around – he must have been hanging around in the shadows,
- at the edge of the party, on the fringe, as he so often would be
he notices these jars along the back wall
an extraordinary number and size, even for Jewish purifying practices
- if they'd under-ordered on wine, they'd certainly over-ordered on jars!

How much water do you need to ceremonially wash your hands?!

- there are six jars. Six!
(if you want an idea of the look and feel, imagine half a dozen 40 gallon drums)
each jar would hold around thirty gallons
that's 180 gallons, 820 litres!

There's a cry from the reception "Steward! We need more wine!"

Imagine the servants making many, many trips to the well

[sarcastically] "Just do whatever my son tells you"

"Why are there so many jars?"

"What's this going to achieve?"

"It's going to take forever to fill them."

"What's the point anyway, it's still going to be water!"

"Maybe they'll be so drunk they won't notice?"

The servants toil in the hot sun, moving as fast as they can, drawing water and filling jars

- sweat glistens on labouring bodies, tired muscles ache

"Steward! More wine at once man!"

Whatever my son tells you, do it, the woman had said

"Fill a pitcher and take it to the steward"

[sarcastically] "Fill a pitcher and take it to the steward"

The others hide behind the door

"Here we go"

"Wait for it!"

- the steward pours a little into a cup
he sniffs, sips, rolls around his mouth, swallows
the servants cringe

"Where did you get this? This, this, this is superb. Superb! Here. See for yourselves"

- the steward is so overcome he pours some wine for the servants
they all take a little sip, and a big swallow
- it's wonderful, just wonderful!

"Where did you get this?"

- the servants look at one another, he wouldn't believe them
- heck, they barely believed it themselves and they'd been part of it ...
"From those jars out the back"

The steward does the unthinkable

- he bursts in on the festivities, interrupts the bridegroom
"It's fantastic. Fantastic."
- he draws the bridegroom aside and whispers excitedly:

“It’s been my experience that people bring out a few pitchers of the good stuff, then when people are, you know, a bit far gone, they bring out the rubbish – barely better than vinegar. But you. You ... You started off with the good and then bring out the top stuff. Beautiful. Wonderful. Amazing ...”

The bridegroom, high on something other than wine, wonders what the steward is on about and excuses himself to rejoin the festivities

- the steward goes back to supervising, smiling and shaking his head
- the servants carry on about their duties
- with occasional furtive looks at the serene woman, her son and their companions who are quietly talking and enjoying the wine in the background ...

I wondered if another possible title or motto could be along the lines of:

- ‘Don’t worry, God’ll fix it’
- yet it’s much, much deeper than that
- half a dozen jars, 820 litres
- that’s 273 ‘chateau cardboards’!
- and it’s not just wine - it’s the best and you can tell

I remember a couple of Christmases ago there was a “champagne tasting”

- at our local supermarket: not wine, champagne, real champagne
- \$90 a bottle champagne
- I was invited to try some, and boy, can you tell the difference!
- makes Lindauer taste like dishwater!!!

This water into wine incident tells us about God’s EXTRAVAGENCE

- OVERABUNDANCE: it’s WAY TOTALLY TOO MUCH
- more and better than needed or deserved

So what is going on here?

To get a sense of that, you might like to consider: who are you most like in the story?

- wedding guests - totally oblivious
- bridegroom - who gets the benefit, but hasn’t a clue there was even a problem
- servants - see the transformation and wonder about this Jesus
- the steward - who is perplexed and asks the wrong questions
- the disciples - who become aware of this miraculous abundance as a sign of God’s presence
- Jesus’ mother - quietly confident because she knows who Jesus is

Like me, you might be tempted to think like the steward and get sidetracked

- to ask about the wine: how, where, why now?
- the real deal, the key, is the ‘transformation’

The transformation of the water into wine is a manifestation of God’s glory

- here’s something I’ve just learnt, from one of my commentaries
- there’s no transfiguration story in John’s Gospel
- I never noticed the significance of that before
- for John, God’s glory is continually being shown in Jesus’ life and ministry
- and this water into wine incident is the beginning of that

The next thing after Jesus' birth and baptism is this

- the incident at the wedding shatters conventional explanations and expectations
- the astonishing quality and quantity of the wine shows the JOYOUS arrival of God's new age

The miracle of the wine shatters the boundaries of the conventional world

- the disciples are shown to be willing to be open to the inbreaking of God in a new way
- to allow their way of looking at the world, and thinking about the world to be reshaped by this extraordinary transformation of water into wine
- the disciples begin to see Jesus as the 'revealer of God' to see that with Jesus something new and unique is beginning and continuing

The disciples just accept

- the steward tries to 'explain', to 'understand' the miracle of water into wine to make it fit what he already knows about the world

To ask did this really happen or not?

- to wonder whether miracles can be believed or the canons of 21st century science should be followed is to miss the point

My commentary says:

"Contemporary hearers of this story must be allowed to struggle with what this miracle says about Jesus"

Are you struggling?

- it seems to me our 'struggle' with this miracle, is not to make sense of it our 'struggle' is to free ourselves in order to receive the extraordinary gifts this transformation of water into wine offers

This amazing incident at the wedding in Cana shows without doubt God's glory

- God's unlimited joy, God's celebration of life it is the first sign of the unprecedented grace of Jesus the first glimpse of the things that are to come
- six empty jars are filled with ordinary water and become six jars of the very best wine
- the sheer extravagance, the over-abundance, shows the unlimited gifts Jesus makes available

Today we are invited to join the disciples in "believing in Jesus"

- to know that with Jesus ordinary water can become superb wine to know that with Jesus there can be more and better than is needed or deserved

All it takes is containers as ordinary as 40 gallon drums

- and a positive response to the statement, "Whatever he tells you, do it"

Imagine two servants on their way home after the wedding:

"What a day eh?"

"Never seen anything like it!"

"Never tasted anything like it."

"You got that right. If I didn't know better, I'd say it was the wine of heaven itself!"