

## Sermon 16 January 2021 'Wedding at Cana'

### John 2:1-11

Here we have the first recorded miracle as performed by Jesus. That in itself makes it interesting but it is interesting on more levels than just that. First, let's set the scene.

Jewish weddings at that time were occasions to be enjoyed by the whole village, and the festivities invariably lasted for a few days. A couple of points to observe on this particular occasion. Firstly, Mary and Jesus must have had quite close connections to the family of the bride. After all, it was Mary who noticed that the wine was about to run out and then told the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to do. That itself tells us two things. Mary obviously has some authority with the servants and also she had complete confidence that Jesus was able to rectify the situation.

I find that very interesting. She knew what he was capable of and yet his ministry was yet to get off the ground. At that point, as far as we know, Jesus had yet to perform any of his miracles which were to become a feature of his ministry.

The second very important point to make here is that running out of wine would be a social disaster of the highest order for the wedding host. Hospitality was very much part of the culture of those days and wine was an integral part of that hospitality. Running out of wine would be a black mark against the name and reputation of the host, a stain that would take years to erase. This is important when we analyse the messages that can be taken from this experience.

The jars of water that feature in this story were used for washing. When anyone entered a home, the first thing they always did was to wash their feet, a task usually carried out by a servant. And then there was the ritual of washing both before a meal and even between courses. Because the festivities were well advanced, these jars would have been close to empty, which is why Jesus tells the servants to fill them up.

So what messages can we take from this story? You might remember that 2 weeks ago I made the point that John's purpose in this gospel is to make a statement about just who Jesus is – the Messiah. So here we have Jesus, right at the beginning of his ministry, making a very strong statement about just what he is capable of – taking something as common and ordinary as water and turning it into something very special.

This is emphasised by what the steward says to the bridegroom – *'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.'* This is a metaphor for what Jesus can do with our lives – take our rather ordinary lives and do something special with them. He can transform us, but we do need to take heed of Mary's words to the servants, *'Do whatever he tells you.'* Only by taking on board the words of Jesus can we ever hope to change for the better.

So in many ways this occasion, this story serves as a signpost for the three years of ministry that lie ahead for Jesus. It is a sign of the power and glory of God; it is a sign of the majesty of Jesus; it is a sign of the kindness and compassion of Jesus – his miraculous act saved the wedding host from shame and embarrassment; it is a sign of the grace of Jesus and there is more than enough for everyone (six large pots of wine is a lot of wine!); it is a sign that life with Christ is not dull and flat, but is life-giving and joyful. Unfortunately, this point is often lost on Christians!

I want to finish by making this point. These signs are a reflection of the priorities for Jesus. Life is all about making decisions as to what we should and should not do, and these decisions are shaped by our priorities, which in turn are shaped by our values and our belief. Let me share a true story with you.

At the 1924 Olympics Games in Paris, the sport of canoe racing was introduced. The favourite team was the United States team. One member of that team was a young man by the name of Bill Havens. As the time for the Olympics neared, it became clear that Bill's wife would give birth to their first child about the time that the US team would be competing. And so Bill found himself in a dilemma. Should he go to Paris and risk not being at his wife's side when their baby was born? Or should he withdraw from the team and remain with his family?

Bill's wife insisted that he go to Paris. After all, competing in the Olympics was the culmination of a life-long dream. But Bill felt conflicted and, after much soul-searching, decided to withdraw and stay home to support his wife. As it turned out, the United States team won the gold medal, and Bill's wife was late in giving birth. The birth was so late, in fact, that Bill could have competed and returned home in time to be with her when she delivered.

But Bill had no regrets. For the rest of his life, he believed he had made the right decision. Bill knew what was important to him, what his priorities were. There is an interesting sequel to the story.

The child eventually born to Bill and his wife was a boy, whom they named Frank. Twenty-eight years later, in 1952, Bill received a telegram from Frank. It was sent from Helsinki, where the 1952 Olympics were being held. The telegram read, 'Dad, I won. I'm bringing home the gold medal you lost while waiting for me to be born.'

Frank Havens had just won the gold medal in the canoe-racing event, a medal his father had dreamed of winning but never did. Like I said – no regrets.

We will have our ups and downs this year, there is nothing surer. But my hope and prayer is that at the end of the year we can look back on decisions we have made, which will be based on our priorities, and we will have no regrets.