

Sunday 12th September 2021

John 2:1-11 (God's amazing provision)

Talk by Andrew Griffiths, Prayers by Betty Friend

Hi, my name is Andrew and thanks for downloading the talk from St John's Penge, for Sunday 12 September. This morning, I will be reading John 2, giving a short talk and then Betty will pray.

Reading – John 2:1-11

² On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.'

⁴ 'Woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.'

⁵ His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from eighty to a hundred and twenty litres.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water'; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.'

They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.'

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Talk

Intemperance – the use of intoxicating drinks is the cause of poverty, disease, insanity, crime, wretchedness, etc.

Temperance – abstinence from intoxicating drinks leads to health, wealth, happiness, etc.

So said an image from the journal, the Star of Temperance, in 1836.

The dangerous moderation bridge, and the tee-total safety bridge – a cartoon attacking moderation, printed in The Temperance Picture Gallery, in 1836.

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle, as for moderation to affect the temperance reformation.

Another cartoon from, this time, the Progressionist magazine. The last uses Christian language to push for abstinence. The only problem is that no one remembered to tell Jesus, at the wedding in Cana, 1800 years earlier, as he provided over 100 gallons of wine for a party. I joke, of course, the temperance movement played an important role in the recognition that clean water was needed for poorer people in London and around the country. It also helped people realise the dangers of alcoholism, which is an addiction that deeply affects people and families today. But there can't be a biblical argument for abstinence that doesn't come a-cropper when dealing with Jesus' first miracle, recorded in the Gospel of John.

This is a well-known miracle and it can be easy to skip over the significance of it – because it clearly is important if John decided that it was the first one he would record. But what is that significance? Because at first glance, it just seems like Jesus is saving the party he was at – rescuing it from the temperance party of the 19th Century. But let's look at a few aspects of the story in a bit more detail to understand the profound nature of this miracle.

What happened? The servants notice the paucity of wine, and Mary, Jesus' mother, mentions it to Jesus. Jesus rebuffs her – and more of that later – before Mary ignores him and tells the servants to do what Jesus asks of them. Jesus does nothing more than ask the servants to fill up some massive jars, and hey presto, the party is saved.

Now, the first thing that stands out is the role of Mary. She recognises the problem – the lack of wine – and prompts others to follow Jesus' solution. She does not tell Jesus what to do, instead she simply says to the servants, verse 5, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Mary takes the initiative, to some degree, but she never tells Jesus what to do. Instead, she trusts Jesus. Mary did not try to do Jesus' job for him, rather she just pointed people towards him.

This is a key characteristic of Mary, her openness to God's will, her humility – we see that in her response to the angel who told her she would give birth to Jesus. Luke 1: 38, 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' It can be easy to think that you have to do God's job for him – at least I am prone to thinking that all the time. When it comes to telling people about Jesus, for example, it can so easily become 'you have to convert people'. But you don't, you cannot – that's Jesus' role, only he can perform. So point people to Jesus, with humility, and let Him take the initiative.

The second thing that strikes us is Jesus' reluctance. Verse 4, Jesus replied to Mary, 'Woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.' There is some difficulty with the translation here, as it comes across as pretty cold – I'd not recommend referring to your mother as 'woman'. But the context of it in the original, or so I am told, expresses more of a distance from the problem, than disdain for his mother.

Jesus says that he does not want to do anything about it, because his hour – his time – had not yet come. What did he mean by this? Well, John uses this phrase a number of times to refer to Jesus 'death and resurrection – in John 12, verse 23, Jesus declared 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.' So this passage marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, but only the start of the road to what Jesus had come to do. Jesus was making it clear that he had not come just to sort out people's wedding problems and

provide booze for parties. He had come to save the world, something that no one present at the wedding could comprehend. But, as I have done, it is easy to miss the significance of this first miracle – because it really did pave the way for his public ministry.

The first obvious link is to the last supper – it was the third day of the wedding, a detail clearly meant to make the reader, us, recall that Jesus rose on the third day; and it was wine, the symbol of Jesus' death on the cross for our sins, that is the key element to the miracle. The second link is that Jesus uses the jars which were traditionally used for cleansing. Russ talked about the way cleansing is used by the gospels to refer to Jesus' cleansing us from our sins – so, Jesus' mission is hinted at through the tools he used for the miracle. John does not spell this out for us, but this story does point the way to the cross through these allusions, in a way that only we – Christians who know Jesus' full story already – will understand. Mary, Jesus' disciples, the other wedding guests – none of them will have understood.

The miracle also hints at Jesus' identity through the associations with some Old Testament stories: Such as Elijah in 1 Kings 17, where the prophet asks for bread from a widow, and in return her jars of oil and flour never run out. There is imagery in Isaiah 25 and Hosea 2, where the restoration of God's people is likened to a wedding party where the wine does not stop flowing. This miracle makes the point that just as the wine Jesus provided was the best wine at the end, so Jesus is the good wine that has been kept back until his time has come. In the gospel of John, faith is a response to the revelation of God through Jesus – as we see in verse 11. This revelation began here, with the allusions and links back to the Old Testament and forward to the cross and resurrection. For John, it was about saying that Jesus was the one that they had been waiting for. Jesus' reluctance was less about turning water into wine, than about the long, hard road to calvary – because this was no meaningless miracle, but one, if you look hard, that shines right to the heart of the gospel story.

Third, and the point of the whole exercise – this was not really about wine, but about faith. Jesus did the impossible, and as verse 11 says, performed 'the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.' Because despite his reluctance, Jesus provided with ridiculous generosity. He provided 100 gallons of the finest wine – that is 607 bottles of Argentinian Malbec, and Puligny-Montrachet. It is full, free and extravagant, and this huge generosity is revealed in this miracle. As verse 11 says, this revealed his glory – and his glory was generous, gracious and ridiculous. It was more than they could ever imagine. But it only pointed towards the full and amazing, gracious and generous, gift that Jesus truly came to deliver – that of eternal life, in perfect harmony with God.

This miracle was, however, low profile. Only the servants, Mary and Jesus' disciples seemed to know what was going on – the rest of the wedding party was oblivious. Jesus kept a low profile. And he often does the same in our lives. How often has it only been in hindsight that we can see God's hand, his love and grace surrounding us? At the time we simply do not notice. This requires more reflection – something I admit to being a bit rubbish at! We should take the time and reflect, recognising and thanking God for the blessings he has

richly given us. Because otherwise it can be easy just to breeze past them, and not recognise the glory of God that has been revealed to us.

The response to this is faith, that is the point of this story – at its heart it is a story of the amazing provision at a wedding. The miracle of water, something normal and prosaic, being turned into something amazing and special. It is a call to faith – that God can change the ordinary into the extraordinary. And that he can do the same in your life and the lives of those around you. Trust in Jesus, because just as he can turn water into wine, so he can transform anything else.

Let's pray.

Dear God

We thank you that you can turn the ordinary into the extraordinary. We thank you that you do this in our lives every day – we thank you for your amazing, generous and overwhelming grace. Lord, we are sorry that we do not always notice, reflect and thank you for your loving kindness. We thank you that you can change anything in our lives and the lives of those around us. And we pray that you will continue to change us and make us more like you.

In your name we pray. Amen

Now Betty will continue with our prayers, as read by Sue.

Prayers

Almighty and heavenly father, in the name of Jesus we bring our prayers to you knowing that you hear and answer us as we call to you.

Father, we pray for our world where there is so much suffering and pain. For those who have lost loved ones, homes, and livelihoods as a result of natural disasters. For those suffering from covid where there are insufficient vaccines because wealthier countries are holding stockpiles. For refugees fleeing their homes and countries as a result of fighting. For those who do not have enough food or clean water. For those who are totally bewildered and traumatised by what is going on around them. For children who are frightened and confused.

Lord, we ask you to bring order and peace to our disjointed world. Especially at this time we lift Afghanistan to you. We pray for safety for those who fear reprisals from the Taliban and for the women, when it seems that orders curtailing their freedom are announced daily. We pray for missionaries and aid workers living and working in difficult and dangerous areas. Have your hand of protection on them, and on our persecuted brothers and sisters.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer**

Lord we bring our country to you where covid infections and the number of deaths each day are rising. While we have been praying individually that this pandemic would be brought under control, we are sorry that as a nation we have tried to cope on our own and have not

turned to You. Our politicians are busy condemning each other, when they should be on their knees seeking your guidance. We pray that with the influence of Christian MPs they will come to see that You have the answers. We pray your blessing on the NHS and social care sector, that those who have been waiting a long time for treatment will receive it sooner rather than later and that a fair way will be found to fund social care.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer**

Loving Father we thank you that the parish of Holy Trinity with St. John's is now a reality and we ask that the integration of the two congregations will run smoothly. We pray for Jessica as she takes on the role of vicar of this enlarged congregation. Strengthen and guide her in this task. We pray for St. John's school, that after so much disruption over the last eighteen months this will be a good year for them with any lost schooling made up. Bless the staff and make this not only a place of learning but one of kindness and happiness where the name of Jesus is proclaimed. We ask your blessing on other outreach projects which have been in abeyance such as Little and Big Fish. We pray for the CAP team, Amaze Penge and Living Well. May people come to know you through these activities. We ask your blessing on Messy Church today, that the families attending will not only have fun, but will come closer to you.

Finally, we ask your healing hand on those we know who are suffering in mind body or spirit and we take a moment to bring them to mind.

Father accept these prayers for the sake of your son our Saviour, Jesus Christ who taught us to pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**