

John 2. 1-12

John's gospel contains 7 signs to show who Jesus really is. Today we're going to hear about one sign/miracle. His gospel is a bit like a 7-piece jigsaw and today you will only have the one piece. Fortunately for us though we have seen the picture on the box - we know what picture John is building towards.

2,000 years ago, in Palestine they knew how to party. We may think that we live in a party culture, full of festivals and parties for every social event but where weddings are concerned we are quite tame. These Jewish weddings lasted about a week. There's a bill I'm glad I'm not going to be getting.

Last week we heard that Jesus had called some of his disciples together and now they have travelled to Cana with Jesus, his mother and brothers to attend a wedding. As Joseph isn't mentioned he's probably already died. Everything appears to be going well until this social embarrassment happens. The wine runs out! I was trying to think of any social faux pas in my past - most I think are too deeply buried in my memory [for good reason] for me to remember. But I do remember when I started going out to eat in restaurants and being faced with this huge selection of knives, forks glasses etc. and waiting for someone else to pick something else up first. Also, those pesky side plates, is it the one on the left or right that's yours? Way back in my youth I'd have been very embarrassed to get these things wrong, now I'm far more relaxed and realise that it's not going to be the end of the world if I put my bread roll on the wrong plate. But back in Jesus time the embarrassment of running out of wine was far more serious than my examples - the hosts would have faced public humiliation amongst their relatives and neighbours [who would all have been at the wedding].

So, there's a problem at the wedding which becomes clear when Mary tells Jesus "They have no more wine." This isn't a direct question to him to do something - quick go around the corner to Majestic wine and buy some more. Rather it's a statement to Jesus as she knows who he is, the one to go to when in need.

Jesus reply can sound rather challenging to our 21st century ears and I think if my son spoke to me like that he'd get one of those looks that only mothers can give. But this is to take the language out of context, it's 2,000 years ago, the language was more formal than today, and it was usual to address an adult female relative or friend as woman.

Jesus continues by telling his mother that his time/his hour had not yet come. We of course have the knowledge of the end of John's gospel, we know his time/hour to be the fulfilment in the events of the cross and resurrection. Jesus priorities are different from Mary's, he lived to carry out his Father's plan. Jesus would reveal his identity by the signs he did.

But at the wedding they don't have that knowledge.

Mary wisely isn't put off by this conversation. She respects Jesus authority and shows confidence in him by her willingness to leave the matter with him. Instead she gives the servants some of the best advice that we can ever receive "Do whatever he tells you." It's so good that I'm almost tempted to get that quote tattooed on my arm!

We heard in the reading that there were 6 stone jars and perhaps when you heard this you didn't think much about a few jars. It's like hey so there are some jars nearby - great. But if we look at the language used in John's gospel its very precise, not flowery and descriptive like Matthew or Luke or action after action like Mark; it's more spiritual, its more about who Jesus is. So why would John go to the trouble of describing stone jars? It's because they would have been used for the purification rites when they would be full of water for washing but now Jesus is using them to transform not just water into wine but also as a symbol that these empty jars [representing the Torah-the Jewish law] are empty like the rituals whereas he has changed them into a source of abundance, a source of celebration.

Jesus is saying that is what he is offering here. He's not simply transforming water into wine but people too and by their faith in him, he can give them abundant life, life to the full, everlasting life. He fills us with his spirit and goodness. The water gets a new identity as wine, just as we get new identity when we are transformed by Jesus, when we believe in him. So why did Jesus turn the water into a superior wine not an ordinary house wine? This points to the superiority of the new covenant that Jesus has brought over the old. It also points to God doing a new thing from within the old Jewish system fulfilling the OT promises of abundance of wine in the messianic days.

So, the first miraculous sign happened, and Jesus revealed his glory and the disciples believed and put their faith in him. It fulfilled Jesus promise to Nathanael that we heard last week that he would see heaven open. This sign and those that follow all support the claims Jesus made and are intended to lead to or confirm faith.

This sign takes place in very ordinary circumstances and through it we witness Jesus acting in compassion to the needs of the wedding couple and their family who would have faced social disgrace with no more wine to serve. This first sign is quite different from others which also show Jesus' glory [when he heals the sick etc]. It's a great example of Jesus being compassionate and dealing with those in need in unexpected ways - just like he can do today.

I started by asking the children what do you need at a wedding? – and of course the answer is the transforming power of Jesus. So, what are our needs? All of us here today have different needs but our one true need is a saviour which we have in Jesus. In the sign we looked at today we saw Jesus compassion for people and willingness to meet people at their needs. And through our faith in him he will provide us with what we truly need - love and hope and a promise of eternal life. Later in John's gospel his time had come, all the pieces of the puzzle are together, and the picture is clear.

So please take away the small wooden crosses you were given on the way in and keep them somewhere you will see them such as a coat pocket, in your purse on your desk as a reminder that you already have everything you need - the transforming love of Jesus.