

## A Wedding

*Isaiah 62:1-5; John 2:1-11*

The story of the Wedding at Cana is not a simple tale of a super-miracle exposing Jesus' supernatural power of turning water into wine, framed with a happy wedding background. With a broadly familiar wedding theme John in his gospel is planting deeper stories with more symbolic meaning. In this story Jesus and His ministry is introduced with important symbols.

1. The joyous wedding.
2. The six stone water jars.
3. The thirsty wedding guests.
4. And finally, the abundance of wine.

When reading the Bible the Spirit of God will often invite us to look more deeply and find other layers of meaning beyond the surface.

Days after Jesus' encounter with John the Baptist by the Jordan – the three days are significant – pointing us towards the Easter story and resurrection – we alerted to the fact that something special is going to happen; Jesus and His mother and friends are in the happy setting of joy and abundance and welcome and inclusion. A wedding. In those days the bride and groom celebrated their marriage not with a honeymoon but with a seven-day wedding feast at the groom's home. We're lucky to get off with an afternoon, wedding breakfast and party in the evening – seven days! In Aramaic, the Semitic language Jesus and His friends spoke, the word for 'wedding feast' has the same root as the word 'drink'. Here is a sign for a time of great partying and rejoicing. People would come from near and far to meet friends and family members. Weddings were great occasions for a huge family and village gathering.

Cana is less than ten miles north of Nazareth, and only ever mentioned here in John's gospel. After the baptism, it is at the table, in company with family, friends and strangers, that Jesus' first 'sign' about Who He really is and what He really came to do is revealed. Against the backdrop of food and drink; against the backdrop of one of the important forms of human relationship, marriage; against the backdrop of an everyday joyful event, a wedding, Jesus, the Lamb of God, the One Who has come to heal the world and remove its faults and sins and failings, is placed, amongst the people. Our Saviour is One Who engages with the everyday and the ordinary. Yes, there will be extraordinary moment and stunning revelation, but don't forget to look for Jesus beside you, in the ordinary things of life. There you will find Him at work, right alongside you. That may be the first sign: do not forget to look for Jesus in the joyful times. Do not forget to say thank You to Jesus when things are going well in your life.

Faith is not only for the grim days and the bleak days and the painful days and the sad days. Faith is for the bright days and the happy days and the wonderful days. Look for Jesus in the everyday joys of your life – and find Him there. And say thank You.

Nobody looked for Jesus until the wine was gone. Old wine was still wine, even if it was not the best wine. Old wine was enough to keep the party going. Old wine was enough to keep the party guests from seeking Jesus. Might it be the case that sometimes it is the old, not the empty, that gets in the way of the need to look for Jesus? Old attitudes and actions; old habits and prejudices, old hurts, old insecurities, old information, old rituals that coalesce to create old, dry religion. Old wine, still wine, but keeping us from seeking Jesus. You will find no argument from me against living tradition, or relevant history, or ancient practices with contemporary application. Not all that is new is helpful, or tested; but not all that is old is fruitful, or sustaining. Our living faith needs to

work with both, and test and use both, making sense for today what belief should look like and do.

As long as there was food, music and wine nobody thought about the Lord. John doesn't tell us of any special greeting for Jesus. He was not the guest of hour. No one asked Him to give a toast or even acknowledged His presence until the wine ran out. It's not so surprising. There are many people who do not seek Jesus until something runs out. The current season of change and re-forming across the Church of Scotland reveals the huge efforts a reducing number of people are making to keep things going. And when Churches close, communities, who by and large have generally turned up for Christmas, weddings and funerals, are outraged. "But it's 'our' church!" they say. "It belongs to the whole community!" "You are taking the heart out of our village/town, area!"

Wake up, Scotland! Use it or lose it. In fact, commit to it and its life and upkeep in a planned way, not just when you have a spiritual need. No one looked for Jesus until something ran out. No one looked for the Church until it wasn't there. Not just its worship and music and prayer life and wedding and funeral holding, but its community facility for everyone, not just believers. Maybe this applies to church-goers and non-church-goers alike.

Thank God at Cana, Jesus was still to be found. Pray God in Scotland today, Jesus may also still be found.

The symbols of the wedding revealed that the old religion of Jesus' day lacked hospitality and vigour. The six ritual stone jars signify the old order, run out. Jesus provides overflowing wine that will ever run dry – is the symbolism here. We're not talking about literalistic miracles, we are talking about the bigger picture. When Jesus is found, and called upon, more blessing is given to us than we know what do with in our daily lives. We're not talking magic here, we're talking about the

sustaining energy Jesus gives to us, in bright days and bleak days, to keep going on, to reinvent old ways, to try new things, to be different people. Might it be the case that the symbolism here, what we're meant to wonder about, is not that the jars are empty; and not that the jars are depleted; and not even that the jars will run dry. The issue is whether or not we, with our faith, will go to Jesus to be filled. When the wine ran out, Mary went to find Jesus.

Nor was she put off when He told her, "Not now, mother!" What Jewish mother would give up that easily. She says only two things, 'The wine has run out', and, knowing Jesus would respond to need, tells the servants, 'Do whatever He tells you.' Mary understands that if you want the Lord to move into your lives, you must be prepared to do what He says.

Jesus was reluctant to reveal His true self to the wedding guests, but this was His mother, and He obeys. And in ways we do not understand, water turned into wine. The six ritual water pots are empty, but now filled. The old ways of the former religion were spiritually empty, Jesus comes to fill them with the new wine of His love and mercy and social inclusion and generous action. Jesus helps the party to continue. Jesus brings new life into old religion.

For those thirsty wedding guests represent all people. All people hungering and thirsting for hope, healing, forgiveness, acceptance, purpose, direction, joy, love. Not just wedding guests in Jesus' time, but people today, with the same needs and longings to be nurtured and nourished, to be welcomed to the table of Jesus' love and inclusion. To have a place, and to be fed. And in response, well, to believe. And to follow the One Who has provided.

There is such an abundance of good wine at the Cana wedding that everyone, including the wine steward, is shocked. Wedding etiquette in ancient Palestine advocated serving the good wine first, then the less good later on when people would not notice the difference. There is enough wine,

not only for wedding guests, but a whole thirsty world. Come to Jesus and drink your fill, He has enough for everyone, to sustain you, and to revive you.

The Wedding at Cana is full of all of these signs, and more. In John's hands it is a sign pointing us to Who Jesus is, and what He came to do. Some will see it and believe. Others will see it, and doubt. Jesus' faces is reflected in the pools of flowing wine being poured out for the laughing, happy wedding guests who are present to celebrate life an new beginnings. In those same vats of wine the faces of the believing disciples are also seen. Because of this sign, the disciples believed. In the joyful gathering; in the overflowing wine; in the recognition of your own thirst; and in the abundance of what Jesus did then, and does now, might it be that we too, today, might tip-toe to belief also?

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**

**Amen**