

Cana Wedding. Jn 2 1-11. Ray Slade

January 30th 2011 Epiphany 4

I am delighted today to be able to share some thoughts, some reflections on my favourite miracle – the turning of water into wine. CHEERS.

I will proceed with the following structure.

FIRST we will just walk through the text and en route pick out some key features.

THEN I want to develop three insights, one from the narrative as a whole and two from key points in the reading.

As I have so often said before we mustn't jump straight in. We must look first at the ancient world context and then take the step of figuring out what we might learn today about God and his Kingdom. As always I have looked at the views of several scholars from different traditions to help us on our way.

(One said this, in advising the aspiring young preacher. 'The Christological revelation of the story must not be reduced to a discussion about the facticity of the miracle'. I didn't know there was a word 'facticity'. Nor did my spell checker. Anyway you will be relieved to know that I will not be making that mistake.)

So make yourselves comfortable, maybe adjust your positionicity and we'll begin.

Walking through. The account is very well known of course.

It's a wedding celebration and it's in Cana near Nazareth. I know of at least 10 of our congregations who have been there.

Jesus, Mary and the disciples were at the wedding; presumably invited and not 'crashed' as some speculate for the reason the wine ran out!! Wedding celebrations often lasted several days of course. Hence judging wine requirements could be tricky. The phrase '**binge drinking**' comes to mind! 'Drink sensibly' wasn't on the agenda then.

Anyhow the wine had run out and Mary **tells Jesus**. **Why** we might ask? They are guests! Maybe it was a community affair and Mary helped with the catering. It seems unlikely she was expecting a miracle but was just calling upon her son's resourcefulness. It might just save the bridegroom's family a little embarrassment.

There follows a **strange reply** from Jesus (v 4,5) and we will pick that up shortly as one of the key issues.

Then water is turned into wine, **lots of it** and we will also look at the significance of that.

When the MC in v9,10 tastes the wine and realises its superb quality he points out to the bridegroom that usually the best is served first and only later, when the guests are absolutely legless is the plonk produced. We can infer from the 'now' in v10 that at least some are at that point.

So on to our three reflections.

First looking at the miracle as a whole.

I am grateful to Graham Dixon for this thought raised on one of our Alpha evenings. It is a strange thing but all the miracle has really done is help a guy avoid the slight embarrassment of wine, seemingly more than enough, running out because too much was consumed by the guests. It doesn't compare with healing a crippled person, restoring sight, raising from death even feeding a hungry crowd.

In a way it's **trivial not life changing** or especially helpful.

But it helps us to understand that, in his love for us, **God, Jesus, is concerned even for minor trivial matters.** I recall once Billy Graham being interviewed and saying he often prayed that he'd find somewhere to park his car when going to town. A fully Christian life allows God into every part. We can cast **any of our cares** on him. Yes we must pray for really big needs, for the really unwell, those in real trouble but he will respond to our ordinary prayers for ourselves, our families, our friends etc. The point is to know that we can **surrender all** to him. Of course we must keep things in a proper balance and match prayers for ourselves with bigger prayers for others. (That old adage JOY = Jesus first, Others second, Yourself last). But God loves us and he expects that we will **'cast our cares on Him'**. Because he cares for us.

If you would like to pray after one or two folk will be in the communion area at the end.

Now let's turn secondly to that strange conversation between mother and son.

Mary says "They have no more wine." ⁴ "Woman,^[a] 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."

It is a rebuke but probably much milder than it appears. 'Woman' is used when maybe something like the American 'Ma'am' is nearer to it. More respectful than it seems but no doubt with a **certain distance**. Jesus in effect tells Mary that **his world, God's world is not yet her world**. She doesn't fully understand where he is coming from. Later she will, when **his time has come**.

But the important thing is that she **shows total trust** in him when she tells the servants to **do whatever he says**. To use an important phrase she **'lets God be God'** and then trusts, obeys.

We learn an important truth here. We have an advantage over Mary and others of that time in that we do understand much more of the big picture. Jesus' **time has come** the cross, the resurrection, the amazing truth of the opportunity through faith to be restored, forgiven, brought into God's domain, his kingdom. Through **genuine faith** we can experience that **living hope of eternal life** with him.

And if you are not fully into that picture please speak to one of us or **stay and pray** after.

But having said that there are still things where, as Paul said, we **see through a glass darkly**. We don't understand all of God's ways, all of his decisions. We should do all we

can through studying his **Word** to build up our understanding accepting that some things we will not understand until later on while others will not be grasped this side of glory.

We must like Mary allow God to be God and respond by trusting Him, obeying Him

We used to sing 'trust and obey for there's no other way'.

Mary did not let partial understanding get in the way of faith. Nor must we.

Finally the wine.

Yes the guests have probably had more than sufficient alcohol already but they are about to get lots more. 6 x 25 gallon containers full. That's, say, 150 gallons. Some arithmetic. 1 gallon is 8 pints in avoirdupois. A pint is 0.57 litre. We are talking 700ish litres. At 0.75 litre per bottle that's getting on for 1000 bottles of top quality Ch Petrus, Ch Latour, d'Yquem, Montrachet etc. We don't know how many were at this wedding already pretty well oiled but another 1000 bottles are about to enter the mix.

So what does this tell us?

Jesus is undoubtedly saying something about God. It's a kingdom message.

We have a superabundance, an extravagance of wine both in quantity and in quality.

SHOW Kingdom of God **new life wine** is infinitely superior to old religion **old life water** is part of the symbolism. **'I am come that you might have life', said Jesus, 'and that you have it more abundantly'**. Hence the abundance, the extravagance, of his provision for us.

We don't understand everything and we must try to understand more. But understand one thing. God in his love has made **huge provision** for us not just in the short term (now) medium term (death) but in the long term as well. We can access that long term picture through **faith and trust and obedience** to Him.

'I am come that you might have life', said Jesus, 'and that you have it more abundantly'

Nicky Gumble ended the Alpha talks, and his book 'Questions of Life' with the following:

'How great God is and what a privilege it is to be in a relationship with him, to be loved by him and to serve him all our lives. It is the best, most rewarding, fulfilling, meaningful, satisfying way to live. Indeed it is here that we find the answers to the great questions of life.'

My hope, my prayer today is that this remarkable account of the first miracle of Jesus might point us towards that reality. Do pray with us after if you would like to do so.

¹ 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, ^[a] 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 twenty to thirty gallons. ^[b]

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 realize 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.

