

## Abundant Grace

Epiphany 2 - 17<sup>th</sup> January 2010

### **Readings:**

#### **John 2:1-11**

**Lord Jesus, come among us in your glory. Forgive us all the ways we have trivialised and scaled down your glory. Forgive us the ways in which we've watered down what you have for us and what you have done for us. Forgive us for the times we have turned your wine into water and rationed it out. May your abundance be felt this day so that all may see see your glory and believe. AMEN.**

Do any of you have recurring bad dreams? I have one, and just before Christmas it made it's unwelcome appearance in my bed. I suddenly found myself in church for a service, no clothes on, trying to hide my nakedness, and with no sermon manuscript. In fact I had nothing at all for the service.

I'm not sure what was worse - having no clothes on or having no sermon. At any rate, it's a dream, variations of which have appeared in my bed, down through the years, from my times of anxiety before Uni exams where I dreamt I had nought to write, to dreams of me standing penniless and alone in a foreign country. And I'm sure the amateur psychologists among you will have been able to work out that the dreams all have anxiety and fear at their root, a fear that there is not enough. Not enough brains, not enough preparation, not enough money. In fact these dreams are but a reflection of what goes on in my waking hours too. - When I'm a way from home I insist in carrying more money than I'll ever use, and when we're entertaining I usually buy more food and drink than we really need. I'm always afraid of running out.

And that's why I love this story that John has for us as an opener for Jesus' public ministry. I have to say that I have some sympathy for Mary, Jesus' mother. Her anxious words - "They have no wine" reflect the fear that all of us have at some time that we do not have enough to deal with the situations we find ourselves in.

However, there'd be some who'd say that it is an odd way to begin a gospel. Jesus at a wedding reception. Not at all like Luke's gospel, where next week, we'll learn Jesus begins his public ministry in a synagogue, a much more suitable place for him to be.

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And there'd also be some who would say that turning water into wine was not a worthy sign. Wouldn't a more appropriate sign have been a healing or some work of compassion? Not this water into wine.

But like so much of John's gospel there's more going on than meets the eye. To see this story as a simple miracle, a demonstration of heavenly power, is to miss the deeper meaning of this story. Jesus starts his public ministry in John so differently from all the other

gospel stories. At a wedding. And weddings are all about new beginnings, they are about new life - full of hope for the future. And hope for the future is what Jesus has come to bring.

And if we look more closely at Mary's words, "They have no wine" we will find that they are they are reflective of a theme that runs throughout the gospel of John. - The theme of human need and failing being met by God's abundant grace. So we have in later chapters of John, the royal official who will plead "come before my little boy dies." And the lame man who describes his helplessness as "I have no one to put me into the pool." Even his disciple, Philip who realises the scarcity of money and bread and says "Six months wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." And the blind man even though he has been healed remembers, "I once was blind..." And then there's Martha and Mary who send a message to Jesus, "Lord he whom you love is ill." In John, all these statements combine to create a chorus of human afflictions. They reflect the suffering that we all face illness, lameness, blindness, hunger and death. In short it is as if the human condition is so jeopardised that people cannot celebrate. 'They have no wine,' to quote Mary.

So Jesus responds to Mary's plea in such a way that all who saw it are amazed at the generosity, the outpouring of wine, the outpouring of grace.

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And verse 11 of our reading says "**Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory and his disciples believed him.**" So just what was it that his disciple saw? How was it that glory was revealed, and why did they believe?

Well any good Jew would have been a little taken aback about the amount of water used in this first sign. Six stone jars each holding 20 - 30 gallons. That's 120-180 gallons or around 600 litres of water turned into wine. That's a lot of water! That's a lot of wine!

Anyone tell me why they'd have six stone jars each holding 20-30 gallons sitting there in the first place?

Yes, they were there for ritual purification. But for a faithful Jew a handful of water was all that was needed to ensure purity. And that's the glory that Jesus disciples must have seen. They'd have looked at all that water, all that wine and seen it as some sort of parable concerning purification. Jesus here is demonstrating his glory through the abundance of purification that comes through him. That much water, was enough purity, not just for the wedding guests at Cana, but was an abundance that would stretch out over time and space from Cana to Calvary and eventually to Pilgrim Launceston.

It was for the disciples a sign of God's abundant grace to us all in Jesus Christ. A grace that has been evident even in our own living. Jesus meets each of us in our anxious dreaming and is able to turn the water of our living into wine.

Through Jesus, we are born again, to use another image from John. We are all changed from water to the best wine. So there's a lot more going on here than a little conjuring trick.

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And I'd want to say that we see the echo of this first sign of Jesus at Cana, here at Pilgrim all the time. Because of God's ability to change water into wine through Jesus Christ, we believe that God can also change us.

It's what motivates us to minister in his name. To reach out to our neighbour who is having a bad time of it. To take under our wing the lonely person who others find difficult to deal with. To stay with the person hurt by relationships that have broken down. It's what motivates the many volunteers at Pilgrim who reach out to the elderly and young alike. It's at the centre of what we do through Maggies and it's what behind our *UnitingCare* agency, at the very core of its existence - this idea that through Jesus Christ, miracles can happen. If Jesus is able to change water to wine, perhaps there is hope for me. Perhaps there is hope for our community. Perhaps there's hope for our planet. Perhaps others will be able to see the God glory as we and others are changed from water to best wine.

So my prayer for myself and for all of us is that we'd put the anxiety filled dreams we all have behind us. And that we ask Jesus to fill our sanitised containers with good wine. "There is no wine" - Not so - with Jesus there is always more than enough.

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