

Epiphany 3 B St Stephen's 9.30 & 11 John 2: 1-11
24.1,21

“There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee” v1

I wonder if the changing of water into wine was the talking point of the village? I mean, six large water jars which provided water for cleansing hands and feet had a lot of water in them – when full, each holding from 20 to 30 gallons – so there'd have been up to some 180 gallons in all, quite enough for a real blow-out. The lack of wine was a disaster, for as the rabbis taught “without wine, no joy.” Not that most people over-indulged, but wine was essential for a gathering such as this. Perhaps more people had turned up than had been catered for.

It is thought that Cana was a small village near to Nazareth, and also that Mary had a special place as it was to her that the complaint that the wine was running out was made, and who turned to Jesus for help. The Coptic Gospel from Egypt suggests that Mary was the aunt of the bridegroom, his mother being Salome, Mary's sister. This would have made Jesus a first cousin to the bridegroom, so he would naturally be invited.

It is tempting to speculate how this change of water into wine could be – but to do so will simply lead us down a blind alley, away from what John wants us to understand.

Jesu's answer to his mother can be read in two ways. His reply to her request "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." (v4). That can be read as a 'brush-off', but in the circumstances, and considering who he is talking to, that seems unlikely. More likely, it means "Mother, let me handle this in my own way. My hour has not yet come," which fits in far better with the account given by John., and Mary had confidence to tell the servants to obey Jesus.

"My hour has not yet come" refers to his crucifixion, which points to the conclusion of his ministry and is fulfilled in a messianic banquet. Remember that Jesus referred to heaven in terms of a great feast when he spoke of the Kingdom of heaven. So this changing of water into wine at the start of his ministry links directly to the fulfilment of his ministry.

This was an important occurrence for the disciples of Jesus who were with him for this might have been the first time that they were aware that there was more to this man than they had so far discovered. That the Kingdom Jesus came to bring was one of abundant provision, underline again in the feeding of the 5000.

As you read the gospels, and in the account of the wedding, it is clear that when Jesus comes into contact with people, things happen. The gospels are full of stories of people being healed, being fed,

demons cast out, the powerful challenged. And in the history of the Church, so often things which seemed impossible have become a reality.

There was a Quaker leader of a small group in the USA in the 1800s. He and his people were at prayer when they became aware of a war party of Indians gathering outside. The door burst open and the tribal chief stood there. Nobody moved and there was silence. The Quaker leader simply fixed the Chief with his gaze, and the sense of peace which he radiated communicated itself to the Chief, who signalled to his warriors to sit down. They remained in silence for another hour. At the end, the Quaker leader invited the Indians to his home for a meal. The power of Christ had again brought healing and friendship.

In recent sermons I have mentioned David Wilkerson, who wrote the book "The Cross and the Switchblade". It contains many stories of lives being changed in US cities. On one occasion David was talking with a group of gangland toughs about God's love, and at the end he challenged the group to come forward and shake his hand. There were jeers, but no one moved. Then a big coloured boy came forward followed by several others. David talked with them for a while, then challenged them to let Jesus change their lives. He asked them to kneel down in the street in front of the gang, and one by one they did. He prayed with them that their lives would find a new meaning.

There's one story I've told before which captures the change Jesus is able to bring to people's lives. A dock worker was just like his colleagues, a hard drinking man, spending too much time in the pub after work and starving the family of necessities. One day he'd heard the Salvation Army on the street corner and it changed his life. He gave up drinking, much to the puzzlement of his mates, who took great pleasure in ribbing him., One day, one of them asked him if he believed in the story of Jesus turning water into wine, He replied: "I don't know about that, but in my home, he's changed beer into food for the family and whiskey into fuel for the fire." They couldn't argue with that. And it's the same power of Jesus to change lives today.

As we hold out our hands to receive the mystery of the body and blood of Christ, be aware that as we receive Christ himself, our lives will be changed.