

Worshipping God Together : Apart
Sunday 16th January 2022 at 10.30am
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

A Wedding Banquet of Worship!

Appetizers

God of unimaginable love, whose generosity can never be measured,
here I am, your child, ready to praise you with joy and thanksgiving!

It's a privilege to be able to explore the amazing 'signs' of God's love.

Today we'll explore one 'sign' in particular that points to the overwhelming
generosity of God's love and to Jesus' identity as God's Son.

I wonder, what will you 'overhear' about God today?

Singing – R&S 549:

Sydney Carter (1915-) © Stainer & Bell Ltd.

One more step along the world I go, one more step along the world I go,
from the old things to the new keep me travelling along with you:

*And it's from the old I travel to the new,
keep me travelling along with you.*

Round the corners of the world I turn, more and more about the world I
learn.

all the new things that I see you'll be looking at along with me:

As I travel through the bad and good, keep me travelling the way I
should;

where I see no way to go, you'll be telling me the way, I know.

Give me courage when the world is rough, keep me loving when the
world is tough;

leap and sing in all I do, keep me travelling along with you:

You are older than the world can be, you are younger than the life in
me;

ever old and ever new, keep me travelling along with you:

Psalm 36 verses 5 – 10

⁵ Lord, your constant love reaches the heavens;
your faithfulness extends to the skies.

⁶ Your righteousness is towering like the mountains;
your justice is like the depths of the sea.
People and animals are in your care.

⁷ How precious, O God, is your constant love!
We find protection under the shadow of your wings.

⁸ We feast on the abundant food you provide;
you let us drink from the river of your goodness.

⁹ You are the source of all life, and because of your light we see the light.

¹⁰ Continue to love those who know you
and to do good to those who are righteous.

Gospel Reading - The Wedding in Cana – John 2: 1 – 12

¹ On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

³ The wine ran out.

Jesus' mother came over to him and said to him, “They haven’t got any wine left.”

⁴ Jesus replied, “But what’s that got to do with you and me? My time hasn’t come yet.”

⁵ Jesus' mother spoke to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you” she said.

⁶ The Jews have rules about ritual washing and purification rites, and six stone water jars were there for this purpose, each one large enough to hold between twenty and thirty gallons.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill these jars with water.” And they filled them right up to the brim.

⁸ “Now draw some water out” he told them, “and take it to the man in charge – the chief steward of the feast.”

And so they took him the water, ⁹ which now had turned into wine, and he tasted it. He did not know where this wine had come from (but, of course, the servants who had drawn out the water knew);



So he called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “What people normally do, is to serve the best wine first, and then the worse stuff when people have had plenty to drink. But you’ve kept the best wine until now!”

¹¹ This event, in Cana of Galilee was the first of Jesus’ signs. He displayed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

¹² After this, Jesus and his mother, brothers, and disciples went down to Capernaum and stayed there a few days.

(Good News Translation combined with Revd. Tom Wright’s translation - for ease of reading)

Praying – As we are gathered (Prayer Handbook 2016 p.8 – John Proctor)

For water that is clean and clear, that stands soft and still
and rains and runs and refreshes,
praise be to God, who waters our world

For water that falls into the earth, that rises in the vine,
ripens in the sun, fills the grape and flows into the cup,
praise be to God, whose goodness is rich and full.

For human life drawn together, in trust and vow
and love and loyalty, in family and friendships,
in companionship and commitment and care,
praise be to God, who beckons us to belong

And for our belonging as Church, as the body of Christ,
as members of one another,
as companion people of our bridegroom Lord,
offering the water of our living
to be turned into the wine of the life of Christ,
praise and thanks and gladness be to God.

Giving thanks

Find a wine glass, or something similar and write down on separate small pieces of (scrap) paper the things that you are thankful for (one piece of paper per 'thing').

Think of and write down the things that enrich your life; the things that make life full-bodied; perhaps a special person; or a cloudless sky – anything that gladdens your heart and causes you to give thanks.

See if you can fill the glass – maybe not just now – it might take a few days or a week (why not look at the notes again next Sunday and re-read them)

Think about how each of those things you give thanks for adds colour and richness to your life, and offer your own words of thanks to God for all the things that give our lives colour and enrichment – the things that make life full-bodied and can transform us

Singing – R&S 191: (Tune: Come ye thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest home)

Christopher Wordsworth (1807-85) and compilers

Songs of thankfulness and praise Jesus, Lord, to you we raise,
manifested by the star to the wise men from afar.

Branch of royal David's stem in your birth at Bethlehem:
praise to you, the ever-blest God in flesh made manifest.

Manifest at Jordan's stream, Prophet, Priest and King supreme,
and at Cana, wedding-guest, in your Godhead manifest;
manifest in power divine, changing water into wine:
praise to you, the ever-blest, God in flesh made manifest.



Manifest in making whole failing limbs and fainting soul,
manifest in healing pain, ending Satan's bitter reign;
manifest in gracious will ever bringing good from ill:
praise to you, the ever-blest, God in flesh made manifest.

Grant us grace to see you, Lord, mirrored in your holy word;
may we seek to know your will, all your purposes fulfil;
then, transformed, your glory see at your great Epiphany,
when you are by all confessed God in flesh made manifest.

The Main Course

Treasures

This story is a bit of a treasure hunt, so I wonder, what treasures are to be found in the story?

1. See if you can find a word in the text that might mean 'clue'. *Answer on last page!*
2. What 'clues' does this story give you about what Jesus will do in the years to come? *Answer on last page*
3. What evidence does Mary have that leads her to believe that Jesus can help out here? *Answer on last page*

What surprises, or interests you about this story?

What 'transformations' were going on at this event?

What would you most want to be able to tell someone else about this story?

A Reflective Prayer

Lord, teach me the lessons of the wedding in Cana
and so shall my weakness become your strength,
my limitations become your generosity,
my water become your wine – overflowing to your glory.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven...

The Speeches

Running out of wine at a wedding feast back then, wasn't just inconvenient, it was a great embarrassment and any family would have struggled to recover from the shame of it. So, although this miracle wasn't about saving a life, it was about saving a young couple and their family the indignity of having the wine run out at their wedding. Without Jesus' intervention this wedding would have been the talk of the town - for all the wrong reasons.

One of the most stand out things about this miracle is the sheer abundance of the wine that was provided out of loving generosity beyond imagining – this isn't just about the provision of a few bottles of plonk, this is about several enormous vats of wine, far more than could possibly be needed even for such a big wedding feast which is likely to have been a big community occasion – Jesus creates something like 678 litres of wine!

Now, John is the only Gospel writer to tell us about this event. He writes about the transformation of water to wine to signify the effect that Jesus can have on peoples' lives (now as then). Jesus came (as John tells us later, in chapter 10) so that we might have life in all its fullness – and this wine certainly isn't just 'plonk' it's the best most full-bodied wine. Because of Jesus' intervention, the most delicious wine is provided for the end of the feast!

Jesus' mother tells the servants, "do whatever he tells you". So, perhaps doing as Jesus tells us is important in order for transformation to happen. Perhaps we're required to take those 5 words very seriously.

Of course, Mary knew Jesus very well, so perhaps there's also something here about what happens when we take Jesus seriously as his mother did, and also as the servants at the banquet did – they were people who probably didn't really know him at all. So, here we start to discover that Jesus is not just for those 'in the know', an elite few, but for everyone.

Which leads me to notice that the first people to realise what had happened were not the important people there but the lowliest of them, the servants. They were the only ones who knew that they had put water – plain old water - into the jars and that the best wine came out of the jars.

What do we know about the jars that were used at this wedding feast in Cana? Well, they were the sort of jars used to contain water for the ritual washing that the Jews were required to undertake to fulfil Jewish Law. But Jesus is doing a new thing with the trappings of ritual and law. Amos 5: verse 21 says – 'I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies'.

Jesus is doing a brand-new thing, he will teach in a new way. This wedding is a *foretaste* of the great *heavenly* feast in store for God's people. In using the jars that were used for the Jewish purification rites, Jesus gives us a sign (or a clue!) that God is doing a new thing. From within the old Jewish system, Jesus is bringing purification to Israel and the world in a whole new way.

Jesus begins his ministry by putting joy and celebration into the heart of community. This miracle has everything to do with increasing joy and happiness and celebration – remember Jesus didn't transform wine into water, but water into wine!

Now this miracle was a very practical one, a practical action of Jesus'. So, what practical action you can take this week to help someone in need? How can you bring joy, or abundance, or transformation to someone's life?

And how can Jesus transform you? Just ask!

Deserts

Singing – R&S 353: MP 683

*F. W. Faber (1814-63) alt.**

There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice which is more than liberty.

There is plentiful redemption in the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the members in the sorrows of the Head.

There is grace enough for thousands of new worlds as great as this;
there is room for fresh creations in the Lord's unfathomed bliss.

For the love of God is broader than the measures of our mind;
and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.

But we make his love too narrow by false limits of our own;
and we magnify his strictness with a zeal he will not own.

If our love were but more simple we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined by the glory of the Lord.

Holding the World in Prayer

Come near Lord God and listen for the prayers of my heart

Living God, stream of life, flowing with love
in Christ you give me living water.

By your Spirit I am washed, refreshed and renewed.

in prayer, I reach out to the world, thirsting for justice, peace and kindness.

I pray that my purposes may find your purpose,
and that I will be led by your wisdom and your love,
I pray in hope and join my love with your love, Lord God.

I pray for the church, local and universal,
that your Spirit may bring us close to Christ,
and closer to each other,
I pray in hope and join my love with your love.

I pray for people in need through hunger, illness, imprisonment,
abuse, oppression, violence and war,
that the Spirit of Christ may restrain wrongdoers,
bring comfort to mourners,
persistence to peacemakers,
and courage to all who thirst for what is right,
I pray in hope and join my love with your love.

I pray for all nations, and all who have power and influence within them,
in politics, business, the media, culture and religion,
that they and we may seek and cherish
justice, freedom, tranquillity and dignity for all
especially in these difficult days when life seems stressed, divided
and chaotic

I pray for wisdom for all governments and 'rulers'
I pray in hope and join my love with your love.

I pray for all nations and all peoples,
that we may grow together in humility, respect and care
for all human beings and for all living things,
I pray in hope and join my love with your love.

I pray for people with faiths other than my own,
that as we sing and tell our saviour's story,
we will listen to their stories,
and find wisdom, hope, and truth in our conversations
I pray in hope and join my love with your love.

I pray for all those known to me,
whose names I lift before you now in a time of quiet

Keep a Silence.....

May they come to know your peace, healing and grace.
I pray in hope and join my love with your love, Lord God.

Living God, Living Christ, Living Spirit,
to you alone belong all worship, thanksgiving and praise.
Accept my love, and lead me on,
reborn, refreshed and renewed through Christ,
my Rescuer, Companion and Friend. Amen.

(Adapted from a prayer written by Brian Wren)

Singing – Junior Praise 408: Graham Kendrick Copyright © 1986 Thankyou Music

Jesus put this song into our hearts
Jesus put this song into our hearts
It's a song of joy no one can take away
Jesus put this song into our hearts

Jesus taught us how to live in harmony
Jesus taught us how to live in harmony
Different faces, different races, He made us one
Jesus taught us how to live in harmony

Jesus taught us how to be a family
Jesus taught us how to be a family
Loving one another with the love that He gives
Jesus taught us how to be a family

Jesus turned our sorrow into dancing
Jesus turned our sorrow into dancing
Changed our tears of sadness into rivers of joy
Jesus turned our sorrow into a dance

Blessings

As Jesus turned water into wine
transforming and enriching the most basic necessity for life
with fullness and colour
may I become someone who transforms and enriches life for others
in response to what you, Lord God, have done to overflowing.
Lord bless me and lead me onwards and outwards
as I seek to be a person of blessing to others.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all evermore. Amen

Answers!

1. 'Signs'
2. *The servants know what's happened first (the 'least' in the 'rankings' become the 'first')*
Jesus transforms something from one 'state' to another
3. *Mary will remember what was said about Jesus by angels, shepherds, the Wise Men, Anna and Simeon. She will also have remembered what happened when Jesus went missing in Jerusalem as a boy.*

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