

## ***Where our water becomes one with the Vine ...***



*Wedding at Cana – Jen Norton*

One of the many things that I love about our Lord is that he loves a party. He loves times when we get together, share food together, learn about each other and love together.

But also ... it is such a 'Jesus' place for a party .... At a wedding party thrown in a small village by a poor man and his family

We know it's a poor family because they run out of wine. Jewish weddings are a big affair. Hospitality and abundance are a matter of pride, but here a budget has been juggled, and it hasn't quite come off, and... *there is no wine...*

Jesus is there, with his mother, as they always are and always will be. There with us when we feel stretched, and not enough; there in our places of shame – for there would be shame in this honour-based culture if they couldn't put on a good spread.

*... The more we grow and mature, I think, we come to see that in the midst of joy there is so often the shadow of sorrow.*

But ... Jesus' mom is there, and it is she who sees and she who prays "Son... they have no wine"... and to the servants... "do whatever he tells you"

We always have Mary on our side, at our side: seeing, and praying, encouraging us to do mad, trusting things. That's one of the lovely things about Our Mom, she shares the outrageousness of her 'Yes' to the Lord with us. She encourages us to go all in, even when it feels like impossibility. And to take part in her son's mission of bringing healing and joy to a world that knows so much shame and despair.

Those servants too, they must have been appalled, no wine to bring, the news to break to the bridal party.....

*... the sense of being powerless to help might also be a familiar one to us...*

God who created the world from nothing, does not need the servants to fill the vessels with water ... but he wants us to join with him, to be his partners – after all, Mary herself is Θεοτόκος; God-bearer. So.... when she instructs the servants, she invites all of us into the divine-human partnership into which Jesus calls us.

*...Take comfort, sisters and brothers, there is always something you can bring.*

They are witnesses, too, those stewards. They are the only ones who know that the beautiful wine – (that word Καλος in Greek means something beyond just good – it means fine and beautiful) – they're the only ones who know that moments before it was just water.

They – and we – will be called to share that news – to tell of the transforming presence of God in our lives.

*It's Epiphany – the season where God shows himself to us, and encourages us to show him to others.*

"There is no wine", says Mary.

"woman", says Jesus – and this name is important, especially in John's gospel where every word has its significance.

This is the name Jesus will also call Mary when she stands at the foot of the Cross: "Woman, behold your son" – it points us to the passion, and to his gift to us of his mother, restoring us to his family. But 'woman' also sends our thoughts back to the start of creation – back to Eve, the first woman – and again to the presence of human failure and shame in the midst of the garden of joy.

*In calling Mary 'woman', Jesus is showing us that this beginning of his ministry, this bringing of joy, is a redemption of all failure and shame, from beginning to end, – and it is for all of us to share in.*

**On the third day**, begins our gospel .... On the third day from what?

Three days later than our reading last week when Jesus declares to his disciples that "you shall see the heavens open"; and makes a promise to Nathaniel that he shall see greater things. He then begins his ministry with a feast, ram-full of echoes of creation and re-creation, his humanity and his divinity.

*Three days later...* only means resurrection to the early Christian readers of John's Gospel.

It is also the seventh day, if you count through the gospel, from the first gathering of the disciples. John is spelling this out for us in no uncertain terms. In the beginning was the Word, says John, but now Creation is revisited and renewed.

*Here, the Day of Rest has become a party - a foretaste of the heavenly banquet we heard of today in our reading from Revelation.*

'My hour is not yet come' says Jesus, but then proceeds to turn water into wine. We see the beginnings of his ministry here, but it points us on to his passion and resurrection, where water and wine will once more flow in the precious blood from the cross – and on again to the fullness of the hour at the end of all time when all things shall be brought to rejoicing and healing. Now. It is now, and also it is not yet.

Because, as I said at the beginning, the more we grow and mature, I think, we come to see that in the midst of joy there is so often the shadow of sorrow. There, under the surface of the party, is shame and scarcity.

It links well with the reading from the First Book of Kings today. A reading that would have been familiar and in the minds of John's Jewish readers. The poor widow who is on the brink of starving to death with her young son – and whom the Lord God feeds, in partnership with his prophet. Do whatever he tells you, says Mary, for she knows that in God the *jar of meal will not be emptied nor the jug of oil fail*. She – and John by recording it – are pointing us to see in Jesus God the Shepherd King, who always feeds his people. The creative abundant power of God which has held his people all through the ages. Of course, the story of the widow of Zarephath also leads on to one of the Old Testament Resurrection stories, with the death and resurrection of her child a few verses on... and this, I think, is probably also an echo that John is deliberately reaching for... because seeing this in this story points us to another way of thinking. We can see the surface of the party. We can see the struggles that we bury in our souls under our social veneer and the things we accomplish. And ... deeper yet we can see an even deeper and eternal truth:

*In the midst of struggle and compromise, in the midst of the shadows, there is one who speaks life, who turns water to wine, who takes away shame, who brings joy and life abundant. The Creator, and Redeemer. Who meets us now and leads us through, and on....*

So, dear sisters and brothers, just as in Cana they feasted on the Lord's goodness together as he turned water into wine, let us come to the altar, and feast on his goodness together as he turns wine into his very self, that he may be life within us. Where our water becomes one with the Vine.

Because there is a feast in Cradley/Hasbury, and Jesus is here, – well, of *course* he is... 😊, in the midst of all, as he always is, and always will be ...

*... and the day of shame becomes a day of rest, and the day of rest becomes a day of hope restored, and joy unexpected.*

And we? ... we are called to share in it....  
And to share it