

St. German's Cathedral 10.30am 22.01.23

Baruch 4: 36 - end of chapter 5

John 2. 1-11

*'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her,  
'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?  
My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to  
the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'*

John 2: 3-5

+ May my words and your hearing be in the hands of  
God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

I wonder what you make of the wedding of Cana in  
Galilee?

If we think of the synoptic Gospels, that's Matthew,  
Mark and Luke, we are familiar enough with miracle  
stories. Usually we see them as meeting some  
desperate need and Jesus responding out of  
compassion. John has many fewer miracle stories  
than the other Gospels and calls them signs, so why  
does John highlight, indeed begin Jesus' public  
ministry with what might be construed as a rather  
trivial miracle?

The wedding taking place at Cana gives us no details  
of the ceremony, instead the focus is on Jesus and  
what he will or will not do.

Weddings in Middle Eastern culture might last several  
days and were an important communal occasion; the  
thought of such a party coming to an end prematurely  
because of the lack of wine would have been a social  
disaster. The custom of lengthening wedding  
celebrations seem to be developing here too!

(You know what it is like yourself to run out of food  
when offering hospitality!)

Mary says to Jesus rather starkly:

*'They have no wine'*

and this is followed by what looks like a rather blunt  
response:

*'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?'*

We might summarise it in a single word:

*'So!'*

Jesus then speaks of his *'hour'* not yet coming. He  
does this a number of times in John's Gospel (7.30,  
8:20).

When the *'hour'* does arrive it is in reference to Jesus'  
death (12:33, 13:1, 17:1) – the very moment when  
Mary again is present standing at the foot of the cross  
and Jesus once again addresses her as *'woman'* (19:  
26).

Mary is clearly not put off by what Jesus says and  
instead tells the servants to  
*'Do whatever he tells you'*.

The mention of servants gives the impression that this is not a poor family, and this is reinforced by the fact the household have six large water jars made of stone, which would not have been available to everyone.

Despite Jesus 'So', as it were, to Mary, he gets on and gives instructions to the servants to fill these jars used for ablutions and take the contents to the chief steward.

Perhaps a lesson for us is that we can't just sit back and expect God to work miracles in our world, but not recognise the important part we should play as fellow workers with God, as co-workers for the Kingdom.

(One of the titles given to Mary is that of co-redemptrix - co-redeemer, this may to many ears sound scandalous to say this of Mary, but it does make the point that for the incarnation to happen it required a 'yes' from Mary. So in our world for things to happen and the world of God to break in requires Christians to be active and persistent)

So to continue:

The chief steward tastes the wine and makes the statement:

*'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.'* (2: 10)

The steward is portrayed in the Gospel story as being completely unaware of the source of the wine. However the steward has recognised that a social convention has been changed - serving the best wine first and when guests are getting tanked-up then serving rather poorer wine!

The listener to the Gospel, unlike the steward, knows the full story, so sees the steward making a comment, which might be simply an issue of the quality of the wine, but to the hearer would mean a good deal more. John uses this device famously on another occasion (John 11: 50) when Caiaphas the high priest speaking about getting rid of Jesus is reported as saying:

*'it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.'*

The comment is then added by the Gospel writer:

*'He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation.'* (v51)

So what is *'the good wine [kept] until now!'* that the steward is referring to?

The marriage of Cana - the water into wine and the banquet mark the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God. The Jewish people looked forward to a Messianic age which was often described in terms of a marriage banquet and a superfluity of good quality wine.

The reading from Baruch also speaks of God breaking into this world bringing joy where there is sadness. The wedding at Cana echoes this same sentiment.

Other details of the Cana story find echoes in the Old Testament - the abundance of wine, for example, was associated with salvation at the end of time, as mentioned in Joel (3:18) and Amos (9:13). Joel puts it thus:

*'On that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine ...'* Joel 3:18

Here therefore the wedding banquet and the abundance of wine (and what an abundance it was at Cana – the quantities suggest 150 gallons - the equivalent of 800 bottles of best quality wine!) there is indeed the sign of the presence of the Kingdom.

Jesus through his public ministry ushers in the messianic age – this is the essence of *'the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee'* (v11) when he reveals his glory.

What might this Feast have to say to us?

**Firstly** it offers hope for those at the end of their tether. The wedding party at Cana was about to come to rather an abrupt end – they'd run out of wine. How often have we found ourselves at the end of ourselves, when we simply can no longer do it by ourselves and need the intervention of God or others to help us! Perhaps we have uttered those last resort arrow prayers!

(There may be many people around us – some very proud people who once did everything for themselves and can no longer do it and need a gentle offer of support. Do we have any idea how many people there are in food and fuel poverty in our communities?)

Mary through her intervention, came to the aid of those who'd organised the wedding feast and help save the day. How can we be Mary to others, intervening and interceding with God in our community?

**Secondly** when Jesus does act, he acts in a way which is completely out of proportion to the problem. God's **generosity is completely overflowing**, not just literally, but metaphorically too. The miracle response to Mary's interceding is super-abundance of quality wine. How often do we respond to people in their need in a minimalist kind of way - perhaps even begrudgingly.

Can we open our hearts in a rather larger way following the example of God's overwhelming generosity to us?

Can we be a sign of the Kingdom here at the Cathedral by sharing our gifts and offering who we are to God and neighbour in need?

Can we be a sign that the miracle of Cana is not just something that took place 2,000 years ago, but rather something that takes place today too! During this week of Christian Unity are there things we can do with our fellow Christians from other denominations more effectively than on our own.

(As you will be aware in the Cathedral's Abbey garden we have a Carrara statue of Mary who before arriving here had her hands vandalised. The statue indicates three things:

- the iconoclasm associated with the Reformation
- The fact that the local Cistercian Abbey of Rushen was dedicated to Mary
- The opportunity to use the prayer attributed to St Theresa of Avila which I now end with:

.....

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,  
no hands but yours,  
no feet but yours,  
Yours are the eyes through which to look out  
Christ's compassion to the world  
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about  
doing good;  
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless all now.

**+ Amen.**

**The Very Revd Nigel Godfrey, Dean**