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John 2:1-11

### **Becoming like Christ : at a good party**

Terry has planned our Sunday services until June. Contrary to what he may have you believe when he speaks I don't tell him what to do! But I am speaking on one of my favourite bible passages today! The miracle of Jesus turning water into wine, at the wedding in Cana.

What I didn't reckon on was speaking the week after Stephen! This sermon series is designed to help us become more like Christ. Stephen helped us lay a foundation using a powerful image of a bride walking down the aisle towards Her bridegroom. It's worth going back to. Stephen quoted Ephesians 5: 25-27. The work Jesus is doing now, has been doing throughout history and will continue until it is complete, is to prepare the bride, radiant, holy without blemish, for the bridegroom. The bride is the church, we are the bride. She starts to come down the aisle in her beautiful dress and a tin of paint is chucked over it, then it's hacked with scissors, then a voice says "what's he marrying her for she isn't very nice". The sadness of the bridegroom as he sees his bride's dress ripped to shreds, yet still he looks on her with love and continues his work because he knows the ultimate end of the story. Stephen was showing us what happens when we criticise the church.

Weddings are full of biblical symbolism. The coming of the Kingdom of God is referred to as a wedding feast. The miracle of Jesus turning water into wine is as rich in meaning as the richness of the best vintage wine that was tasted that day.

Stephen also referred to different theological perspectives linked to what type of music helps us worship God. The transcendent cathedral music and the intimacy of some of the simple modern songs. The story of the wedding at Cana leads us more towards intimacy and meeting Jesus in a way that some can find shocking and maybe disrespectful . This story is very precious to me.

The setting is a wedding in the village of Cana. We have been there and this is the church that commemorates this miracle. There is even a first century water jar down in the crypt but it isn't nearly as large as those referred to in the story. 6 jars of 20-30 gallons each, that's big, in the region of 900 bottles of wine, that should keep the party going!. God is good, what amazing generosity! First century Jewish weddings could last up to a week. A celebration with food, wine, music, singing and dancing, the wedding included the whole community and it was paid for by the bridegrooms family. Hospitality was extremely important and running out of anything especially wine would bring great shame on the host family. Jesus had compassion on the family that day and saved them embarrassment, but there is a lot more to this story.

When Terry and I have a quiet evening in there is nothing we like better than watching a murder mystery, as long as it's not too scary before going to bed! Very often you can pick up clues early on as to the resolution of the story. Terry is annoyingly good at this. Somehow being able to grasp the whole story through clues given at the beginning. There are clues throughout John's gospel. But it's more of a treasure hunt than a murder mystery. John even refers to this story as the first sign v11. But John is a master at laying out the clues, as we'll hopefully see in further talks as most of the talks will be based on readings from John's gospel. They will help us get to know Jesus better and in that process become more like him.

I think the key thing to grasp is that each of John's clues or signs reveal more of who Jesus is. The fact that Jesus lived a human life shows that God doesn't stand aloof and separate from His creation. He joins in, just as I imagine Jesus fully participating in this wedding party, laughing, dancing, enjoying himself. I love this story because Jesus is fun to be around. It gives us permission to enjoy our lives.

This first miracle in fact like all the miracles, is an act of transformation. In each of Jesus miracles we see the miraculous transforming power of God breaking into the world. Here water being supernaturally transformed into wine. Interesting that this first miracle isn't sickness being healed or someone being set free from an evil spirit. The marker is being firmly put down God has power over everything. I love this story because it tells me that God can transform anything or anyone. To use Stephens analogy God can repair our wedding dresses, God can heal His Church. God wants to transform you and me if we will only let Him.

It's significant that the water Jesus turns into wine is water in huge vessels which were used for purification rites. This makes us think of the Jewish law. How shocked strict Jews would be to know that their water jars would contain wine. The Law had become the rigid practice of keeping yourself acceptable to God by ritual washing and keeping away from anything or anyone considered unclean. Time after time the gospels tell us that Jesus was criticised for mixing with unclean people, disabled people, anyone ill, tax collectors, lepers, those wearing stained wedding dresses. But Jesus tells us he has come to fulfill the law not overturn it.

It's significant that this miracle takes place at a wedding, as I said earlier, The bible refers to the coming of the Kingdom of God as a wedding feast, great joy and celebration. I love this story because it tells me there will be parties in heaven. The weekend Terry and I were married was a most wonderful time of celebration. At the end of the reception one of the guests said "this party was like a glimpse of heaven". No one could have said anything better.

Did you notice how this story starts? "On the third day"- remind you of anything?. Jesus resurrection took place on the third day. The resurrection is the evidence that Jesus completed everything he intended. The Church will be restored. The resurrection gives us hope that ultimately all evil will be defeated. How wonderful that this first miracle points to the triumphant ending. The bride will be ready to meet her bridegroom.

My favourite phrase from this story is "You have saved the best to last" v10 (our bibles say you have kept the good wine until now).

In 2008 I was going through the most distressing and difficult stage of my life. I was huge emotional pain and at that time I could not see how it could possibly end, all I could see ahead was misery. I attended New wine that summer in a very sad state. But it was as if God had provided just what I needed the bible study talks were called "Jesus Wept" and all about suffering. About God being with us when we suffer and that God doesn't send suffering but it is a consequence of the broken world we live in.

And one day during one of the worship songs I felt God say to me "the best is yet to come". I can testify that nearly a year later things changed dramatically. And God is faithful.

With Jesus the best is always yet to come or saved the best til last. To me this is very comforting because it stops me from regretting wasted opportunities from the past. We can get glimpses, sips, of the richest best wine now but there will be much more later. This promise isn't just for me. It is for all of us. The more we party with Jesus, allow him to smile at us, talk to us, join the dance with him, especially if we "do whatever he tells us", our lives will get better and better, maybe not our health or our finances but our joy, sense of contentment, peace and freedom will increase. Cheers!

