

'Given as water, but drunk as wine'

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

*Live lives worthy of the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory. –
1Thess.2,21*

Collect: Grant that your people may shine with the radiance of his glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Thanks be to God

1 Father, never was love so near;
tender, my deepest wounds to heal.
Precious to me,
Your gift of love;
for me You gave
Your only Son.

*And now thanks be to God
for His gift beyond words,
the Son whom He loved;
no, He did not withhold Him,
but with Him gave everything;
now He's everything to me.*

2 Jesus, the heart of God revealed,
with us, feeling the pain we feel.
Cut to the heart,
wounded for me,
taking the blame,
making me clean.

And now thanks be to God . . .

Words and music by Graham Kendrick

Jn.2,1-11 'Jesus turns water into wine'

Dear friends

John calls this event a "sign", meaning that it tells of things not immediately apparent, but hinted at on a deeper level. There is more here, he says, than meets the eye, and we only use rightly or beneficially what he tells us if it helps us to understand something of the work and purpose and presence of Jesus that this event itself does not fully disclose but does in some way suggest and point to. Because it is a sign, we will not lift the treasure hidden within it if we do a surface search only. The effort that will repay with joy must be willing to look more deeply.

But we may begin by asking: How does John know? How does he know it is a sign, one that tells us something more and deeper than just the fact that Jesus did an amazing thing and performed a miracle, giving delight to the people concerned and us a fine story? The answer can only lie in Jesus' own behaviour and words. Only they can legitimise the claim that here is a sign which leads those who follow to a joy of knowing something that is best and most appropriately symbolized by the joy of a wedding feast!

And that is indeed where the answer is. Had Jesus not said and done what he did, John could not speak of a sign that led him and the other disciples to "*believe in him*".

We must realise that Jesus does not just "happen" to be at the wedding party, merely as a guest and in a way that, to him, is unconnected to his ministry (to what he has come to do for the world!). He is there for a purpose and with a purpose, and this purpose is that of his ministry – to be the Redeemer!

What Jesus says to his mother, "*Woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come*", shows that Mary connects his presence at the wedding with the purpose of his ministry. That is why he replies to her indirect call for him to help the situation in the way he does. He is saying to her: "I am not here to sort this problem as though this is what my ministry is about. But the event of this hour that you are about to witness will show you something about my ministry when my hour that has not yet come will do so: when I will sort the problem that I have come to sort, when I will give the help that I have been sent to give." For our understanding of this we must connect Jesus' word '*my hour has not yet come*' with the words '*my hour has now come*' which he says to his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion.

That Mary, his mother, understands what Jesus says to her is clear from what she then does by turning to the servants and saying to them: "*Do whatever he tells you.*" For she understands that Jesus is about to do a sign which shall symbolically intimate "*his glory*", that is, what his ministry is set to accomplish (=what God through Jesus does for us!). Indeed, Mary's words to the servants of the wedding feast are themselves heavy with meaning about Jesus' ministry and the glory of salvation (redemption). They too are "sign": The servants serve the wedding feast best when they do *whatever the Lord tells them*. Mary's words pre-figure what Jesus himself shall teach regarding our redemption; for instance, when speaking of his second coming: "*Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns*"; or when he says to his disciples: "*You are my friends if you do what I command you.*" (Jn.15,14)

And so now, what of the event itself? What are we to understand through the way Jesus involves himself in the situation through the miracle of turning water into wine? What of the reaction of the master of ceremony and of the effect of the miracle on the disciples?

It is important to be clear about 2 things. Firstly, that the language of wedding and wedding feast is used in Israel to describe the coming together of God and man in true knowledge, to describe the intimate fellowship with God for which man is created and to which he is called, to describe the purpose of God to rejoice over his people *'as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride'* (Is.62,5). And secondly, we need to be clear about where the event for Jesus begins. The situation to which Mary alerts Jesus by saying, *'They have no more wine'* is one of an approaching catastrophe, of festive joy on the brink of doom. These words are like a judgment on the party, a judgment that spells its end.

But now if we step away from the sign-language of this event in order to behold what it says about the situation into which Jesus has come to minister – to redeem us! -, we are made aware of what our situation is and how it is in need of redemption, of God's saving intervention.

Are we alerted to it, to our situation? Are we alerted to the fact of what is lacking? To the fact that what is lacking is **the knowledge of God**? Are we alerted to the fact of how little the knowledge of God has come to mean and cost, as though it were not true that *'Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love'* (1Jn.4,8)? Of how the image of God lies discarded on the face of a humanity that wants to be its own maker and would not know of either sin nor grace? That there is *'no more wine'* – the knowledge of God suppressed by which we would direct our own steps in wisdom and holiness, do all things for his sake – which because of that would all be light! – in love and unsurpassed joy? Are we alerted by the presence of Jesus Christ in our midst that there is *'no more wine'*, that we have run out of road in our attempt to get away from God and make Him in our image, that our sins know us and put us in the way of the approaching catastrophe that is God's judgment?

Dear friends, Jesus is so alerted; and it is this truth of our situation to which his ministry responds. *'His glory'* is revealed precisely through the way in which we come to know and love God in him, in accordance with the mystery of the incarnation, Jn.1,18: *"No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known."* And at the heart of this is a miracle, of which the turning of water into wine is a figure. It is a figure of the miracle of the incarnation, of Jesus himself in whom are united the natures of both God and man.

Given as water but drunk as wine, the miracle of Cana that saved the wedding feast, is a figure of Jesus' self-giving in his death and his resurrection. What is given in Jesus on the cross is God's judgment on our sins which he bore in our place; and what is received in him is the forgiveness of sins, is grace, is righteousness, is deliverance from judgment, is knowledge of God in the love He has for us (- wine, wedding joy!).

Dear friends, the taste of the truth of Christ is not one the joy of which fades in those who know it, or becomes stale over time, or diminishes as knowledge of it increases. Not, it matures, for the knowledge of God is joy of the kind that shall not end. And like the disciples understood the sign *"and believed in him"*, so let us understand and entrust ourselves to him, in faith to do whatever he tells us to, for this is the best and the knowing way to serve him and the joy he gives. AMEN

Lord God, you have made us for knowing you, and therein lies the fullness of our joy and the praise of your glory; your entire creation longs for the day when your children shall be revealed. For our sins and the evil of our hearts we do not know you in the strength of our own wisdom and understanding. All attempts are but a foolish feeling around in the dark, even as it creates darkness. Indeed, how silly and vacuous all our pronouncements are revealed to be – how dark our own light – when Your light finds them out. We thank you that you have committed all things to your Son and

have sent him to make you known. 'No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' Through him we know you, in whom our blindness is removed and sight is given for seeing and knowing. In your gracious love let us not lose sight of him, who is the desire of every nation, but know him, and in him you, faithfully and increasingly – in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the praise and glory of your name. Amen

- take time to pray before God, in the name of Jesus Christ and with thanksgiving, all the concerns He has laid upon your heart

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen

May the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ shine in your hearts, transform your lives, and brighten the world.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you. AMEN
