

## **Proclaiming the Abundance of God**

### ***John 2.1-11***

Today's Gospel reading is in the familiar setting of a wedding. Most of us can connect to the problem of running short of refreshments for a wedding or other ways that a wedding celebration can be ruined and the party cut short. These images of social disaster evoke within us strong human emotions of anxiety, shame, and compassion.

This grand inauguration of Jesus' ministry at the wedding in Cana is symbolic of a messianic feast at the end of the world. Here our Lord attends a wedding feast and says yes to gladness and joy. In him we find a God who puts joy into life, who thinks it is worth a miracle to keep the party going as we celebrate people. Throughout his life, Jesus of Nazareth celebrated people – people getting married, people being healed of diseases, people enjoying meals together. He carried a spirit of celebration with him wherever he went as he proclaimed a God of mercy and peace and joy. And he wants us to have life, a life in abundance.

In this event, Jesus acts decisively in a family crisis. He saves the family from shame and dishonour in the community. Moreover, he is there with them in their moment of joy and celebration. The wedding at Cana is a marvellous picture of the loving relationship we have with Jesus who is present in the various activities of our lives. He is aware that our best efforts require the touch of God and he is always there to reach out to us when we experience difficulties. He brings healing where there is hurt, forgiveness where there is misunderstanding and encouragement where there is a lack of support.

The wine in the story is the life of God brought to people through Jesus. He can transform us, taking the ordinary in us and making it extra-ordinary, turning anguish into wonder and want into wealth. He enriches the very ordinary, makes it precious and gives an eternal flavour to the commonplace.

The wedding at Cana is a proclamation that God's party is on. He has invited us in. But God's party is not just for us! As we enjoy the party, we must be concerned of those who cannot

join this party – those who live in perpetual poverty; those who are oppressed and exploited and hence have no dreams of their own; those who are given into addictions and have lost control of their own dreams; those who are looked down by others because of their colour, caste, creed or culture. God invites us to his party. Would we be generous to bring others also in?

That is our mission as believers and as churches, and this is what USPG is trying to enable and support in various parts of our world. God is at work and we have a role to play. The story tells us that God needs some space to work. Jesus did not do this miracle out of nothing. He did not make wine appear from nowhere. There were six jars, there was water and there were servants who obeyed Jesus. There was Mary who trusted Jesus and asked the servants to “do whatever he tells you.” God needs us and our earthly jars and ordinary water to make his glory known.

There is a sense of urgency in this story. This is the time for decisive action. This revelation of God’s abundance should challenge us to act as we encounter our world’s shortages and needs, whether of food, medical supplies, shelter or peace. As God is generous we are challenged to be generous in our giving and our celebration.

The steward in the story tried to find out what happened using the normal rational means. But the disciples recognised the revelation of God in the prodigious flow of wine. The steward tried to re-shape the miracle to fit his understanding, while the disciples allowed their understanding to be re-shaped by this miracle. God is calling us to discern what he is doing in our midst and our understanding to be re-shaped by what we see. As Rowan Williams said, “Mission is discerning where the Spirit is and joining in.” Let us join in God’s mission of bringing life and joy to a needy world.

The Gospel writer also says that this was the first of the miracles where Jesus revealed his glory. God’s glory is revealed in the transformation of ordinary water into wine. God’s glory is manifested in an ordinary human celebration, at a wedding, in a normal home, in the service and obedience of some servants. Where do we seek God’s glory? We do not need to go too far searching for God’s glory. God reveals himself in ordinary circumstances, in our

normal needs and struggles, in our little joys and dreams. We can see these signs even in the midst of a pandemic like the one we face now.

This is a miracle of abundance, of extravagance, of transformation and new possibilities. The world will keep talking about scarcity and the forces of evil will suggest that there is no hope for the world because of scarcity. But our message, the message of God, is one of abundance. There is enough for everyone but in our sinful and unjust world, everyone does not experience this abundance. It is our job to tell the world, in words and deeds, what God has given. May God bless and enable us in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

The Rt Revd Dr John Perumbalath, Bishop of Bradwell, Chelmsford Diocese