

Isaiah 62; 1 - 5. - God rejoices over you!
Psalm 36 - With you O God is the well of life.
1 Cor. 12; 1 - 11 - Gifts of the Spirit of God.
John 2; 1 - 11 - The Wedding at Cana.

What an odd miracle! It seems to break the rules in many ways. It is not a healing, or a blow against evil. Neither does it help someone who is dire straights in any way really, although it could be said that it saved the embarrassment of the Groom, if indeed they had unexpectedly run out of wine. Even that is not obviously the case - we are simply told that the wine had run out. Maybe it was time for the wine to run out! Maybe that is how they knew when to go home! This miracle seems simply to be a demonstration of power, which I don't really see in any other of the wonderful acts of Jesus. But maybe if we look at the actions and reactions of the Heroes and Anti-Hero of the story we may see what is going on here.

The Heroes of the story for me are the servants. There is no intimation in the story of the Gospel so far that Jesus does this sort of thing on a regular basis, so why did those servants do as they were told? What they did was proper daft really!, unless they had some sort of expectation of an unexpected outcome. Filling those jars was a job for before the feast, and now they were finished with and just in the way, and besides, they were enormous, and with no running water, someone (the Servants) would have to go running up and down from the nearest water spring or well with buckets or smaller jars. It must have taken ages!

And then there is Jesus' Mother's similar expectation of what her Son would do. What had happened to make her think He could or would do anything? Or was it just that as a senior guest Jesus might be in a position to go and sort out some more wine from somewhere? He was by now probably Head of his household and of some standing in society and so maybe this was expected of him and Mary was reminding him of his obligation?

Yet there is some hint in what has gone just before today's reading. In the story of the calling of Nathaniel in chapter 1 we read of Jesus, having seemingly 'seen' Nathaniel from afar and read his character

and heart, then as saying '... and you will see greater things than this...' with regard to what would be seen by Nathaniel and the others in the future.

This story of the Wedding starts with a time link to that day and that saying, or prophecy - 3 days later - a sort of Biblical standard time for the revealing of a prediction (and possibly a link to that greatest of wonders that happened 'After three days' - the resurrection).

Whatever the case, those servants were real Heroes! Without any recorded comment or objection they fill up the jars - a big job as the jars are not small - and then proceed to draw the liquid out and take it to the Steward of the feast. Now I have heard some preachers say that they still didn't know what had happened, but that takes from them every and any degree of intelligence. Of course they could see and smell what had happened (and perhaps even taste - for who could resist? I am sure I would have to have a sip at the least!) or they would have been less keen on taking the wine to the Steward - their boss! They knew and later on they must have testified to both the source and the provider of the wonderful provision - of rich, full wine.

For me however, the Steward is the Anti-hero. The servants have no problem recognising a miracle when it happens and accepting it, as unexpected as it was. The Steward however refuses to accept or to even recognise the wonder. This wine has come from down to earth sources, just like any other wine - this is natural wine from a natural source - 'cos it must be! Where else can it have come from? - despite all the evidence! He 'Didn't know', which sounds like a get out for him - but neither did he ask!

So let us follow the Servants' side of the story. This demonstration of power from above is indeed the beginning (Not as translated so often 'The first' but 'The Beginning' - a deliberate connection to other beginnings in the OT - especially Genesis 1 and of John's Gospel account too!) - the beginning of a new age - one where God was intervening directly through His Son, this was the beginning of those 'Greater things...' that the Master had promised to his follow just three days earlier!

And as to its meaning! -

First we see those Jewish Stone Jars, representing the Jewish, God Given Law and the traditions that had expanded and extended it, now filled with Wine - Jewish tradition and law being full-filled literally and metaphorically, and with better things than the old, stale traditions - This was indeed 'New Wine in old Bottles' Jesus came not to destroy the Law but to liberate it and the people from its thrall. The jars were the jars that would have previously held the water for washing the Guests' feet as they came in from the dusty road outside. Now they were empty. Their usefulness, even under the Law, for now at least, was over, and I am also sure that such jars were only ever used for this one purpose! You would not really want to drink anything that came out of a Foot-washing Jar, would you? From Jewish tradition came celebration and Joy and a wonderful provision for all people. Jesus doesn't break the jars, but he restores to them their original function - that of bringing joy to the hearts of many.

Then we see the authority held by this Jesus over Nature - over Creation - This is indeed John's 'The Word' of chapter 1's wonderful opening poem to that Word that spoke Creation into being, still doing so. Jesus changes the very nature of nature, because here is the Lord of Creation.

And finally, at least for us this morning! - We have a preview of the provision at Calvary for us of the Wine of the Eucharist - The Blood, shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. From the One who is cursed under the Law that says 'All who are hanged on a tree are accursed' flows the New Wine of Salvation, Forgiveness and Joy!

Far from simply showing that Jesus could do miracles, John's Jesus, the very Word of God, does this 'beginning of miracles' and so sets the scene for all the rest of the Gospel Story. Over the next few, brief years, there would be many other miracles, culminating in the greatest of all Greater Things - the sacrifice of Calvary and the events of that first Easter. This beginning of miracles brings in God's New Age by bringing a source of rejoicing to the Guests at a simple country wedding. That last Greatest of Works brings to the whole world the joy

of redemption and of the possibility of a repaired relationship with the Father.

At this table where we share the Bread and Wine of the Kingdom, let us remember both the beginnings and the completion of the Work of Jesus for our Salvation who, from the Cross, said 'It is completed' - 'It is finished' - or in the Greek - 'Tetalesti' - The Old Will and Testament becomes there 'The New Covenant in His Blood' Signed in His blood, and sealed by His Love!

AMEN