

## **SERMON: Sunday – 16 January 2022 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **The Best is Forever Now**

Isaiah 62:1-5

John 2:1-11

(SLIDE)

Contemporary relevance.

(SLIDE)

John has the master of ceremonies declare to Jesus that “you have kept the best until now” (11, *su teterekas ton kalon oinon hews arti*).

First thing to point out here is that the best can be translated as the good.

Second thing to say is the tense in which this declaration is voiced - you have kept the best or the good until now sounds like past tense but in the Greek it's the perfect tense (the perfect indicative active to be precise). Now what's the point of pointing that out you might ask? It's because it translates as something that is done and which is being continually done, something which prevails.

Although most translations say something like “you have kept the best until now”, in other words, past tense, the real meaning is “you are continually keeping, you are always keeping”, which really implies, “in you (or with you) there will never be any shortage of wine”. In you is the best. In you is the good.

Now that's good news for wedding planners - anyone planning a wedding anytime soon? Make sure Jesus is invited!

And of course it's also good news for everyone. Jesus has revealed this first miracle in John's Gospel as the first sign that God alone is the One in whom there will never be any shortage, whose supply can be relied upon, even when we get to the end of our own resources.

This is the God who the Psalmist had spoken about and the Hebrew people knew as “the fountain of life, the light by which we see” (Psalm 36:9).

And the Good of the Trinity who someone recently described as the Source of Love, Word of Love and Spirit of Love.

There's a sense in that with God there is always the best and it is always now and just as the wedding celebration ended up with the best so the end of all will be the best. That's our hope isn't it?

You have kept the best until now. You are continually keeping the best. In you is the best. The best will prevail. The end is the best - meaning of course that the Divine purpose (or end, the aim, the destination, the intention) is to bring about the best or the good. Good wins. The best prevails.

What is the best we might wonder? Well it's goodness, and righteousness (or making things right) and is surely to be found in God as revealed in the Son and the Spirit? Jesus, the Son, God in human form, is sent into the world revealing God's amazing grace and truth.

There's an echo here of the parable of the evil farmers in Matthew 21 how the Manager sends servants who were killed by the tenants, then sends more who meet the same end and then finally sends his own so whom they also kill. The best is sent at the end and in a life that even though he dies he lives again.

The best until now is the coming of the Christ and the Holy Spirit, the union of flesh and Spirit, the new life in the Spirit that began with Jesus of Nazareth and is continually happening until now.

In the wedding at Cana, we see Mary, Jesus' mum, pointing out "they have no wine" (*oinon ouk exousin*) and yet the story ends with them having the best wine possible, more than they could ever need.

The end is the best. The good prevails.

The Spirit causes this shift from having none to having more than enough, from desolation and emptiness (as in they have no wine) to abundance and joy.

You who were once deserted and desolate are now delighted in through that marital covenant with Yahweh, the LORD.

As the prophet Isaiah declared centuries before:

(SLIDE)

No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate.

But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah;

As a young man marries a young woman,

so will your Builder marry you;

as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,

so will your God rejoice over you.

(Isaiah 62:4-5).

Isaiah uses the language of a marital covenant between God and God's beloved - and to proclaim that God's beloved, the Bride of Christ, which includes all of us here, is never forsaken, ever betrothed - continually loved.

Isaiah's prophecy of a marriage made in heaven is an ever present reality in Christ.

And marriage is the great metaphor because it truly is about a deep relationship of love in which we are joined together with God in everlasting union.

Not only is God the source of the best and the good, whose supply will never fail, but much more than that, we are joined together with that same God through the bond of love sealed by the Holy Spirit, the foretaste of the complete union at the end of all things.

The Holy Spirit is none other than God within, that deep internal intuition that keeps drawing us back to our God centred-ness, no matter how lost we get.

The Holy Spirit is the Fountain for our lives, the new wine of the kingdom poured out for all to drink and always ready to fill empty vessels just like the big stone jars were filled to the brim at the wedding in Cana.

Graham Kendrick was clearly under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit when he wrote those words we sang earlier:

(SLIDE)

Compassion of the Father  
Is ready now to flow  
Through acts of love and mercy  
We must let it show  
He turns now from His anger  
To show a smiling face  
And longs that men should stand beneath  
The fountain of His grace

And this idea of standing beneath a fountain to be channels of love and mercy points to the third reading for this Sunday which we didn't read but which I want to link to.

1 Corinthians 12 where Paul describes the new wine poured out as life giving gifts unique to every one who receives. The Gifts of the Spirit are poured out on us for the purpose of building up the church, the kingdom of God (I'm conscious that these two terms are not always synonymous but that's another sermon).

In the outpouring of the best until now, we each receive a gift or gifts for this purpose, gifts which are decided by The Holy Spirit. Paul calls these "special abilities" gifted by the Spirit who decides who does what (11).

Before listing examples of spiritual gifts, Paul points out (in 1 Corinthians 12:3) that

(SLIDE)

"no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit".

In other words, it's only by or in the power of the Holy Spirit that people can stop cursing Jesus and say that Jesus is Lord. And I think it's only when people get to the day when they can say that Jesus is Lord everything else falls into place and begins to make sense and the words of the prophet are fulfilled in flesh and bone, you Lord are the fountain of life (and I am one with you and with all creation). It's only then that we can even begin to recognise

spiritual gifts at work among us (we might not see them visibly at all, others might see them?).

Having recognised Jesus as Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit then the kingdom of God will grow through acts of loving service with different gifts employed for the benefit of all.

As Paul points out,

(SLIDE)

God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.

(1 Corinthians 12:6-7)

Paul lists some gifts here and there are other gifts listed elsewhere in the NT. But at least some of these special abilities will be seen as we set out to serve one another in love.

(SLIDE)

Wise advice

Special knowledge

Special faith

Power to heal the sick

Power to perform miracles

Ability to prophesy

Ability to tell between spirits

Ability to speak unknown languages

Ability to interpret what is said

A healthy church looking for evidence of good health might do well to look for signs of these gifts at work in the church and in the world.

Let's finish by praying and thanking God (in a moment of silence) for the many and varied gifts we see in one another.