

## **Reflecting on God's Word**

Reading: John 2:1-11 (NT page 1064-1065)

### **Background to the reading**

Our reading is the first miracle Jesus performed.

"Third day" here does not refer to the third day of the week, but ancient writers often bracketed off segments of their work by starting and ending on the same note (a practice called *inclusio*); thus John may use this designation to point toward 2:19 and link this story (2:1-11) with the prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection.

"Cana" is today, preferred by most scholars Khirbet Kana, over eight miles from Nazareth. It would have been close enough to Nazareth to explain how the host knows Jesus' family.

Weddings lasted seven days, and hosts invited as many people as possible, especially distinguished guests like prominent teachers. To run out of wine at a wedding was a social blunder that would become the subject of scandal for years. The host was responsible to provide his guests with adequate wine for seven days.

The women's quarters were near the place where the wine was stored; thus Mary learns of the shortage of wine before word reaches Jesus and the other men. Her words probably suggest that he should do something because guests were to help pay the expense of the wedding with their gifts.

"Woman" was a respectful address but hardly customary for one's mother. Jesus' statement here establishes harsh distance because Jesus' "hour" in John refers especially to the cross. So in the way Jesus is saying, "Once I begin doing miracles, I begin the road to the cross."

Like many Old Testament seekers of God who would not take no for an answer, Mary acts in confidence that Jesus will hear her appeal. Ancient Jewish readers, who told stories of miracle workers who insisted that God would send rain, would read Mary's action as demonstrating strong faith.

The description of the stone jars indicates that they contained enough water to fill a Jewish immersion pool used for ceremonial purification. Although Pharisees forbade storing such water in jars, some Jews were less strict; thus these large jars were being reserved for ritual purposes. Stone jars were common because they were less likely to contract ritual uncleanness than those made of other substances. But by using the jars for another purpose would temporarily defile them. However Jesus shows more concern for his friend's wedding than for contemporary ritual.

"Master of the banquet" was a position of honor and one of his primary duties was to regulate the distribution of wine to prevent excess that would especially in a Jewish context ruin the party. At least in Greek banquets, guests elected this person to preside over the entertainment and to control the level of dilution for the wine; thus some observers might have held him partly responsible for the host's running out of wine prematurely.

Soon after the grape vintage, all wine would contain some alcohol because neither refrigeration nor airtight sealing existed. But the alcohol level of the wine was not increased artificially; rather, the wine was watered down, with two to three parts water to one part wine. Yet one would normally serve the better wine first because, drunk or not, guests' senses would become more dulled as the seven days of banqueting proceeded.

God had often manifested his glory by doing signs. Moses' first sign was turning water into blood while Jesus' first sign is turning water into wine.

So what is the message? It seems evident that Jesus was preparing his disciples for a journey of miracles, faith, fellowship, love and hardship. His first miracle would be the introduction to a far greater story they could ever have imagined. Even his mother would be in the "dark" of what Jesus' life would turn out to be.

Amen

### **Sermon**

The text for the sermon is 11b: "He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him."

Jesus transformed water into wine. This would become a pattern of Jesus' whole life as He transformed lives too. He changed the way poor and despised people looked at themselves. He gave children a place and He treated all people with love, mercy dignity and respect. Even in our reading He is concerned enough about an ordinary life event that He transformed water into wine and the best of wine not just any wine! He sacrificed His relationship with his mother, his disciples, his family in order to do God's will. And God still changes and transform people on a daily level, you and me.

The world wants us to get a new look. Society wants us to get a better job or learn a new skill. People want to lose weight or get a face lift. But Jesus does not want to change our looks, He wants to change our hearts. He doesn't want to give us new clothes; He wants to make us new people who can forgive, love and have mercy. He does not want to rearrange us; He wants to transform us - totally to His glory.

We want to look better on the outside, but He wants to make us new on the inside. And when that transformation takes place, it will show on the outside. When Jesus changed the water into wine, he did not just change the colour and fool the people's taste buds - he actually changed the water into wine. When the water was turned to wine, the shame of the bridal family was turned to joy. The mood of the party was transformed. And Jesus' disciples were transformed. Our text verse states, "He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him."

Jesus did not bother too much about the religious laws of his society. He cared about people. He used the prescribed ceremonially clean jars to do something good for the better of others. He filled them with new wine. Likewise did He cleanse all our sins through His blood. The water in the jars were uses to clean the people on the outside. Jesus' blood cleansed us on the inside. He cleansed and changed our destiny and hearts. Our sins are not just taken away, we have a changed heart that desires to love God and live for him.

God performs miracles on a daily level in and around us. There is no limit to His grace, love and mercy. Sometimes He uses people, other times situations . He can even use a very bad situation and turn it into a better one. There is no limit to what God can do. He transforms our lives in ways we cannae imagine or even understand.

One of our friends in South Africa is a beauty queen and married the perfect guy, a popular rugby player. And when she expected her first child, everyone thought of them as a perfect couple. When the baby was born it was soon clear that he had Down's Syndrome. She accepted the fact and moved on. In fact she became a popular spokesperson for the Down's Syndrome society in South Africa. She could transform the stigma that so often clings to Down's Syndrome.

Also in South Africa, someone like Nelson Mandela broke the ice that existed in racial prejudice by his personality, wisdom and charm. I heard him speak at our predominantly Afrikaans University just before the first democratic election and he transformed the very tense situation when he started his speech in Afrikaans.

Here in Scotland, there is also one man who transformed the lives, hopes and dreams of ordinary people. I am speaking of Robert Burns who unlike other revolutionaries did not use violence to change the perspectives of people. He used his vivid imagination and transformed lives with his pen. And now several years later people from around the world celebrate his birth by reciting the pieces he wrote. And by reciting people are once reminded what exactly he said. That everyone is important when he wrote "a man is a man for all that, that the self righteousness of Calvinism is wrong in "Holy Willies prayer" and that heavy drinking is not good at all in the ghost story of Tam o Shanter.

What do they all have in common? They are people just like you and me. They grabbed the chance to be transformed by God and in the event used their talents, gifts and situations to transform people, situations and circumstances for the better.

So maybe you and I must do the same too - every second of every day!

Amen