

**SERMON: 20 January 2019 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

**“The Wedding Feast of the Kingdom of God”  
(1 Corinthians 12:1-11 and John 2:1-11)**

Two words sum up what’s happening in this account of Jesus’ first miracle - Consummation and Transformation (SLIDE). Keep these words in mind as we consider what the Holy Spirit is saying to us.

We know what transformation means but it might be worth defining consummation; not that either of these words is found in the Scriptures, by the way.

One dictionary defines the word ‘consummation’ as “the eager (fulfilment) that follows a long and passionate seduction, the point at which something is complete, made perfect or finalised in every way”.

Consummation is mostly used in the context of the intimate relationship between husband and wife in marriage, hence the context we find here, of Jesus attending a wedding feast as a symbolic telling that Christ is the Bridegroom, the one prophesied of old, who would finally be united with the Bride.

There is so much in the Scriptures of old about marriage as the union between the Lord God and the Lord’s people, Israel. For example in Isaiah 62:3, the prophet says of Israel, “you shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be called, in Hebrew, Beulah, which means married”.

In fact, the very relationship between the Lord and the Lord’s people is described by the prophets as a wedding.

Now we know that earthly marriage is imperfect and incomplete and often doesn’t work out. It certainly doesn’t work without union with the Spirit, again symbolised by the presence of wine at the wedding feast.

But this idea of being consumed and transformed in essential union between matter and Spirit is key. Life is designed to work properly when that union of flesh and Spirit is in place.

There is so much symbolism in John's Gospel. It seems that almost everything has a deeper, spiritual meaning, and so its worth meditating on.

And the Spirit is our Help. He helps us to understand. His gift is wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues and interpretation, and thanks to Christ, we can access the Spirit's help anytime in any place.

(SLIDE)

That's what it means to live in the Kingdom of God. It's like being permanently at a wedding feast with all these gifts to enjoy, and each person is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good, as the Spirit chooses (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11).

(SLIDE) Frances Hogan - Words of Life from John the Beloved.  
([www.franceshogan.com](http://www.franceshogan.com))

- 1 The Book of Signs Revealing the Beloved Son (chapters 1-12)
- 2 The Book of Glory Revealing the Beloved Disciples (chapters 13-21)

(The third day - Tuesday wedding day, 3rd day of creation, twice blessed; weddings often lasted 7 days, a complete or full week).

Jesus has come to inaugurate a new age where Love will reign, where men and women will be committed to each other and to God in loving covenant. This is wedding language. Jesus, Incarnate Love, has arrived, bringing in the heavenly dimension. He has brought His disciples who are the new "Bride" in the process of formation. So who is getting married? The village couple make us look at a spiritual reality alive in Jesus and His disciples. The new life being embraced by the young couple indicates the New Age begun in Jesus, where everyone will be called to the marriage of flesh and spirit, of each one and God. And with every new beginning there is past and present reality to tie together. We will see the old order side by side with the new dispensation throughout our journey. The joy and peace of

this new relationship with God is signified by the wedding celebrations which in those days went on for a whole week.

Jesus will transform the old and give it completely new meaning. The old is a worn-out cloak and overstretched wineskins (Mark 2:22). There is no room for change in them. The old wine, which was not the best wine, has run out. It was imperfect just like the old dispensation it stood for. Only the Messiah could give them the overflowing gift of new wine that the prophets had sung about (Amos 9:13; Hosea 2:24; Joel 4:18; Jeremiah 31:12).

So we must look for the miracle of transformation here that will point to the need for each disciple to allow the water of their life or the old wine of their past to be transformed by Jesus, so that they can enter upon the new spiritual Way He is opening up for us to walk in the Spirit, and no longer according to the ways of the flesh. As with every marriage, the "cleaving" to the new life only comes with the "leaving" of the old one, but it is more of a transformation than a death, a joy than a sacrifice. In offering us the spiritual marriage God has very definitely kept the best wine until last.

(Mary - Wanting to show off her son's power? Believing her son could do anything? Was she learning to recognise him as the true Messiah and beginning to realise what that looked like? Is she in the process of becoming a spirit-filled disciple of this Messiah, not just the earth-bound mother of Jesus?)

(This is an idea Hogan touches on. Mary) responded by putting her trust in Him completely, and, as His disciple, gave her first and last command which echoed that of the Pharaoh in Egypt at the time of Joseph. All who came to him for help were sent to Joseph, as he alone had the answer (Genesis 41:55). Mary happily leaves the mission in the capable hands of Jesus without worry or anxiety. He has the answer and He is in control.

(So much for Mary. Why 6 ceremonial water jars - represents imperfection and incompleteness; its the Hebrew number of human beings (created on 6th day, incomplete without God, symbolised by the 7th day, the SABBATH; humans have shown their imperfection without God).

This and the other signs in John which follow show us that Jesus deliberately replaced the old institutions of worship with the new. The six stone water jars there for the ordinary washing rituals of the Jews.

Jesus gave His first command, and all that followed showed that His word was different to everyone else's because the effects were dramatic. Jesus brings the necessary extra ordinary dimension to the ordinary.

Christ fills the emptiness of life like he filled the empty stone vessels that day in Cana.

(Water) - He commanded that they should fill the jars with water, the most ordinary and abundant liquid that we have, for God works through the ordinary, bringing about the most extraordinary results from His intervention. He uses everyday things to reach us, and the mundane events of our lives to transform us. Hence we need to keep our eyes open to all that is happening on both the heavenly and earthly levels of reality, in order to know what is going on. We must remember that things are happening at the level of the spirit as well as the flesh. By His action of changing the purification waters at Cana, Jesus, in effect, has "taken over" the purification rites of the Old Testament. His own purification rite will be initiated in His Hour but will be explained before then (13:2-15). Jesus goes from this wedding encounter to purify the Temple also.

(120) - the servants fill the jars to the brim, to overflowing. The one hundred and twenty gallons reflects the abundant new life that Jesus is about to give. The "water" of the Old Testament is not cast aside, but is transformed into the new wine of the Kingdom of God.

(Pouring? It's not until the water is poured out that it becomes wine. The act of pouring out was key. Just as Jesus own blood would be poured out on the cross and become for us new wine, filling our emptiness, and uniting us with God.

The best is last. Jesus taught that in his kingdom, the first would be last and the last would be first. So there's something here about people being humble but there's also something about how in the kingdom of God the best is both yet to come and even is already here.

Jesus' presence, his invigorating life, in the person of the Holy Spirit, is the new wine of the kingdom, which has been poured out for all).

This (is) a recurring theme (we see) when we journey (through the Book of John. Time and time again in the Gospel) People don't realise where the new life comes from, or where Jesus will get the living water, or even where He comes from Himself, but the evidence piles up (for the reader) as the excitement in the gospel mounts up.

The conclusion of the early Church as it meditated on the mysteries of salvation (was that) God had kept His best plan of salvation, His greatest favours and His most exalted revelations to the coming of His Son among us. He had answered the prayers of the saints of old beyond all expectation, so that we all exclaim with Paul, in Ephesians 3:21, that God can do and has done infinitely more than we ever asked of Him or imagined that He would do, in Jesus.

(So, to finish, what's the purpose of this first miracle in John? Verse 11 John tells us it was to reveal Jesus' glory, and his disciples believed in him).

To reveal His glory means that Jesus gave an outward manifestation of the presence and power of God in such a way that His disciples could understand and put their faith in Him. Every true prophet had to have proper credentials. Jesus has now produced His first sign, and His disciples begin to recognise its meaning: He is the long-awaited Messiah who will fulfil the Scriptures and give the Father's promise to all mankind, namely the overflowing gift of the Spirit (Joel 3:1-5)."

(John is telling us that Jesus is the complete visible expression of the invisible God, the true likeness of God, through whom everything else exists and finds meaning and is made complete through him and with him, in perfect union together in the Spirit.

.... taking us from death to new life, turning mourning into dancing, replacing a spirit of despair with the oil of gladness, bringing deep and lasting joy into our hearts forever, filling us to the brim and even overflowing, and as we allow the Spirit in us to be poured out, we will see joy and gladness coming to everyone else).

So how might we apply what we see here to our own lives?

We might want to meditate on what it means to give up the old wine and embrace the new?

We might want to spend more time in our love relationship with our Bridegroom?

We might want to recognise more clearly that the Lord's desire is for everyone to become the Bride of Christ, and be made ready for the feast to mark the blissful unfailing ever lasting union, which has now begun and is breaking into all of life, and is being made complete in this new age which is now coming?

May the Lord show each of us how to respond.