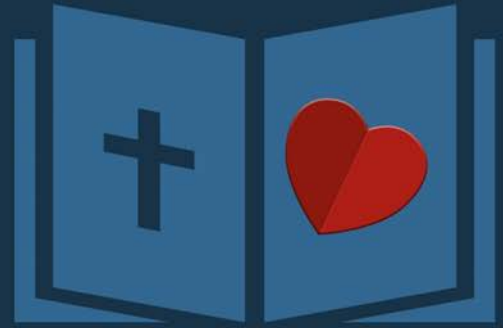


ADULT FORMATION

Word into Life



Wedding at Cana

Christ Church Christiana Hundred

Sermon by the Rev. David Beresford – January 19, 2025

Isaiah 62:1-5, Psalm 36, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, John 2:1-11

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I have a question: those of you who are married, or were married, do you remember your wedding day? I can't remember what I did last Tuesday, but I do remember my wedding day. It was nine years ago. It was the culmination of a long-distance romance with the Rector of this parish. I was married barely sixteen days after arriving in the USA. We were married here, at Christ Church, with a small congregation of about 300 people.

A reception followed in the Parish Hall. One of the things I have learnt about entertaining guests is that when you serve good wine, they will drink it. Prior to the wedding I had bought several cases of excellent claret to serve to the guests. When my bride and I arrived in the Parish Hall, after having our pictures taken, I was informed that all of that good wine was gone, and we were now drinking wine of a lesser quality.

It was the opposite of what happened at the wedding in Cana, which we heard about in today's gospel. There, the best wine was served after the other wine had given out. The bridegroom at Cana was praised by the chief steward for having kept the best wine until last. Neither the steward nor the bridegroom knew what had really happened: Jesus had turned between 120-180 gallons of water into wine.

I will say a little more about this enormous amount later. Now, I want to return to the beginning of the reading, because the miracle almost didn't happen. Jesus had no intention of changing the water into wine. It was only through the intervention of Mary, his mother, that Jesus was able to save the day.

By the way, do you ever feel that God is trying to tell you something? I did, when I read this passage. On the last two occasions when I have preached, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was involved in the story: first, in the visitation to her cousin Elizabeth; second, in the birth of Jesus; and today, at the wedding at Cana. So, in keeping with the spirit of the last two sermons, and to honor Mary as I think God intends, I will focus on her and the decisive role she plays in this story.

Mary at Cana is not the same Mary we first encounter at the beginning of the Jesus story. Then, she was a young girl chosen by God to conceive and bear his Son. Now, at Cana, Mary is a grown woman, probably widowed early, for Joseph her husband is not at the wedding feast, and in the gospels all reference to Joseph ends after Jesus is twelve years old.

One of things we learn about Mary in today's gospel passage is that she is a woman of both compassion and authority. When she learns that the wine has run out, she acts to remedy the situation. Her motivation is to save the blushes of the bridegroom, who was responsible for making sure that sufficient wine was available to meet the demand. Upon hearing the news that the wine has run out, Mary tells her son, "They have no wine." It is a clear hint to Jesus to do something about it.

How does Jesus respond? He says, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." Like many called into ministry, Jesus judges that now is not the time. But Mary will have none of that. In effect, she overrules her son's protest and tells the stewards, "Do whatever he tells you." This is another hint to Jesus. It is also a command to the stewards. Mary is exercising her authority over both the stewards and her son. At last, Jesus takes the hint and says to the stewards, "Fill the jars with water." They do, and when they taste the water, they discover that it has turned into wine.

"Do whatever he tells you." Mary's words to the stewards are a kind of echo of her own reply to the angel Gabriel, when she was told that she would conceive and bear the Son of God. Then, Mary said, in reply to the angel, "let it be with me according to your word."

Mary's confidence or authority in speaking to both the stewards and to Jesus derives from her obedience to God's will. From Mary we learn an important lesson: to surrender your will to God means not that you become enfeebled—quite the opposite. When Mary fulfills the will of God she receives God's spiritual assurance. Her confidence, borne of the hardships and dangers she has successfully overcome in raising her son, reflects the power of God at work in her life.

Mary is not the only one who enjoys God's blessings. All those who do God's will are, in fact, receivers of God's grace, generously poured out for all who turn to God in faith. The symbol of this generosity is the six stone jars which are filled with water which then turns into wine. Actually, it is more than symbolic. With 180 gallons of extra wine on hand, no one at the wedding banquet at Cana would have gone home thirsty.

And what of Jesus? It might appear that his mother has, figuratively speaking, thrown him in at the deep end. In fact, Mary understood precisely why this was the exact moment for Jesus' ministry to begin. A wedding banquet is a symbol for the kingdom of heaven. Thus, there is no better occasion for Jesus to reveal to his friends and followers who he is. The miracle "revealed his glory," and set afire the faith of his followers.

The wedding banquet—the kingdom of heaven—is a place to which we are all invited. In the book of Revelation, there is a passage which describes "the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). For now, our church stands in place of the holy city, the new Jerusalem. She is the bride and Jesus is the bridegroom.

When I recall my own wedding nine years ago, I am conscious of the whole world gathering around two individuals. If I may say so, we made a handsome couple! But then, in my experience, whenever you see a bride and bridegroom on their wedding day, you are seeing them at their best, their most radiant, their most beautiful.

Weddings are a celebration of love and commitment. God in Jesus Christ has committed himself to us. We in the church have committed ourselves to him. Thanks to Mary, the radiance of the married couple at Cana was not tarnished by the failure of their hospitality. Because of her compassion and authority, the wedding would have been remembered for all the right reasons.

The turning point at Cana was the moment Mary said, "do whatever he tells you." She is saying that to us today. Of course, you may need to ask Jesus what it is that you can do for him. That is one of the reasons we pray, which is to open a conversation with the Lord. God hears our every word. When you offer yourself and your gifts to God, you are doing so on behalf of yourself and on behalf of the Church.

“Do whatever he tells you.” If you wish to take your place at the wedding banquet, I suggest you listen to Mary’s advice. You know, before attending any wedding, it is customary to put on your best clothes. In church we are getting ourselves ready, learning about the kingdom of God and offering our lives in service to the King of love. God’s grace is abundant and overflowing. What is Jesus saying to you?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Questions:

1. What word or phrase in this sermon stands out for you?
2. How does Mary’s example inspire us to be closer followers of Jesus?
3. What are the ways we show compassion to others?
4. Spiritual assurance is one of God’s blessings. In what other ways are we blessed by God?
5. Marriage is a divine expression of God’s love for the world. Do you ever think of your faith in terms of a marriage?
6. What is this sermon calling you to be or to do?