

The Marriage at Cana.

John 2: 1 -11.

Isaiah 62: 1 – 5.

The most wonderful wedding in the world was celebrated in this very Church last month. I may be just a bit biased, because it was the day John and I were married.

Weddings can be tricky. They can bring out the worst in a family, and start feuds which go on long after the original cause has been forgotten. Usually it hinges on who gets invited and who doesn't, who has precedence, who sits where at the reception.

Well, in our case, none of that happened. Thanks to very dear and generous friends, many of whom are here this morning, and thank you all once again for all your kindness, our wedding was absolutely perfect.

We don't know whose wedding Jesus and his mother were invited to. Possibly one of their extended family, one of their many cousins. It could have been a notable village personality, for all the disciples were there too.

A wedding feast could go on for seven days! Pity the poor Father of the Bride picking up the tab at the end!
No doubt preparations had been going on for weeks to get everything perfect.

Then, by the third day, when Jesus and his friends arrived, in the middle of the feasting, everyone's nightmare. They had run out of wine! What a loss of face for the family.

And not only that. For a wedding to run out of wine was a bad omen. The very marriage itself was doomed.

Panic stations. What to do? It wasn't as if a couple of ushers could be sent down to the off licence to stock up.

Mary had the answer. Jesus would sort it out.
Of course!

So Mary turns to Jesus and says, "They have no more wine."

"Hang on a minute, Mother," says Jesus. "Don't get me involved. I haven't started my work yet. I'm not ready."

But good Jewish Momma Mary ignores this plea. She says to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

And the rest, as they say, is history.

The six huge stone ceremonial washing water jars were filled, and when the water was drawn out, it was no longer water, but the very best vintage wine the guests had ever tasted. So, instead of being a laughing stock in the village, the family were heroes, greatly admired for their generosity.

What did Mary know? Why did she put her son on the spot like that? Did she expect a miracle?

Did she know that Jesus could do it? He hadn't performed any miracles, signs or wonders before.

Mary was probably a widow by now, and relied heavily on her lovely son, not just financially but for moral support and friendship to. In her eyes, there was nothing her son couldn't do. That's how it often is between mothers and sons.

But there was more to it than that.

Mary knew from his very conception, that Jesus was special. She knew he was the son of God. Mary knew that the time had come. It couldn't be put off any longer.

Jesus was thirty years old. He had already gathered his disciples round him. He knew, as Mary knew, that his ministry was about to begin. The clock was ticking.

The clock that, in three short years would lead to Calvary and death upon a cross.

A pivotal moment. There was no turning back.

This wedding at Cana is a turning point for Mary, too. Her son was moving away from her, physically and emotionally.

He was starting out on the life which would bring her untold grief.

When she and Joseph had taken Jesus to the Temple to be blessed when he was a baby, old Simeon had taken him in his arms and told his mother, "A sword shall pierce your own soul, too".

Mary, at this moment, is giving up her son, sending him out with her blessing for the work he was called to do.

So Mary said to the servants at the wedding "Do as he tells you".

Jesus was about to turn a disaster in a triumph.

Those stone water jars, holding 20 or 30 gallons each, were used for the ceremonial washing of all the guests before they sat down to the feast.

I'm sure the mathematical among you have worked out how many bottles that may be, how many units of alcohol. At least they didn't have to drive home!

We all have a ceremonial washing at our baptism, cleansing us from our sins, and preparing us for a new and better life.

So there we are, with Mary and Jesus at a wedding.
Jesus performs his first miracle, in an obscure country village, up country.

And the first people to know about his first miracle were the servants, the lowliest servants, the ones who filled and emptied the washing water jars. The steward, the master of ceremonies didn't know, all he knew was that the wine was extra good. The bridegroom certainly didn't know. God always chooses the obscure and lowly to do his work.

And what about us?

We like to celebrate.

Without wine there would be no celebration, no happy ever after.

We would like to celebrate that the world is becoming a kinder, fairer, peaceful place, but we know it isn't happening, not yet. And maybe things are going wrong in our lives or our family's lives. Or maybe we are just not so well as we could be. We want to celebrate, but we have no wine.

So like Mary, we turn to Jesus for help. And he tells us, "It is not time yet."

But Mary's message was, "Do whatever he tells you".
And that's what we have to do.

We have to listen in the quiet for that voice speaking to us, and we must be patient.

The muddy, contaminated washing water turned into something pure and wonderful. The water of baptism that becomes muddy with our sin will turn into the wine of eternal life.

The hint is there; the wine becomes the blood, shed by Christ on the cross.

And the new life ahead for us all is the best wine we have ever tasted.

Jesus saved the wedding by providing that essential wine, so generously and abundantly; how many gallons did those stone jars hold? And it was of the very best quality, not to be seen before or since.

Jesus thereby saved the fate of that young couple, so that they would live a fulfilled life together.

And Jesus saves us, by the freely given gift of his blood, so that our futures may be assured together with him for eternity.

As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

Pat Ellis