

3rd Sunday of Epiphany 24th January 2021

Welcome to Praying Together but Separately

Prayer of the Day

God of all mercy,  
your Son proclaimed good news to the poor,  
release to the captives,  
and freedom to the oppressed:  
anoint us with your Holy Spirit  
and set all your people free  
to praise you in Christ our Lord. Amen

Bible Reading: John 2.1-11

**Narrator:** Three days later, they all went to celebrate a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was invited together with Him and His disciples. While they were celebrating, the wine ran out; and Jesus’ mother hurried over to her son.

**Mary:** *The host stands on the brink of embarrassment; there are many guests, and* there is no more wine.

**Jesus:** Dear woman, is it our problem *they miscalculated when buying wine and inviting guests*? My time has not arrived.

**Narrator:** *But* she turned to the servants.

**Mary:** Do whatever my son tells you.

**Narrator:** In that area were six *massive* stone water pots that could each hold 20 to 30 gallons. They were typically used for Jewish purification rites. Jesus’ instructions *were clear*:

**Jesus:** Fill each water pot with water until it’s ready to spill over the top; then fill a cup, and deliver it to the headwaiter.

**Narrator:** They did exactly as they were instructed. After tasting the water that had become wine, the headwaiter couldn’t figure out where such wine came from (even though the servants knew), and he called over the bridegroom *in amazement*.

**Headwaiter:** *This wine is delectable*. Why would you save the most exquisite fruit of the vine? A host would generally serve the good wine first and, when his inebriated guests don’t notice or care, he would serve the inferior wine. You have held back the best for last.

**Narrator:** Jesus performed this miracle, the first of His signs, in Cana of Galilee. *They did not know how this happened;* but when the disciples *and the servants* witnessed this miracle, their faith blossomed.

Some thoughts for further Reflection:

If we were to close out eyes and think of Jesus, how would you picture him? Some of that depends on how well we feel we know Jesus, some of it depends on how good our imagination is. One way that we are least likely to imagine Jesus, especially before our reading today, is partying at a wedding.

We may imagine Jesus on the cross, or preaching to people; we probably find it hard to imagine being sat down at a wedding reception which, at the time of Christ, would have lasted for at least three days, eating loads of food, having a dance, chatting to friends. Imagine being there: relaxing with friends, drinking a glass of wine, and then having someone slap us on the back. We turn around to see Jesus grinning at us.

‘Alright Jesus, not seen you for a few hours.’

‘Yeah, I’ve been dancing’, is Jesus’ reply.

Funny thing is that, even if we instinctively avoid it, the Bible, and Jesus himself, time and again alluded to a wedding as an important metaphor.

Isaiah compares Israel's future to a full-on wedding celebration: "As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5). Time and again Jesus used wedding imagery in his parables. In Revelation John describes the consummation of all things using the imagery of a wedding, this in Revelation 19.

In all likelihood these aren’t polite sedate weddings either. As mentioned, the wedding that Jesus attended probably went on for at least three days – no surprise the wine ran out. There is a tradition in Judaism that says there are occasions which essentially call for excessive partying. Think of Mary pouring the perfume on Jesus’ feet – one year’s wages in an act of worship. We might think of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem by Nehemiah. On that occasion, when the Law of the Lord is read about by the priest Ezra, the people gather to hear the reading o and weep. Nehemiah tells them this is not a time to mourn, but a time to party: "…eat the fat and drink the sweet wine" says Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8:9–12).

Partying is allowed, so which Jesus do you like best, Jesus as Lord and Saviour, or Jesus as your partying friend?

Jesus as a friend is still creator of the universe, still the Son of God, still the Lord of Lord’s, still the Risen Christ, still the person who died for you to take away all your sins, still the person who makes it so that you can know God, still making the atonement possible, still the third person of the trinity, the mystery of the godhead incarnate. It is just that Jesus your friend is someone you can know personally.

Not someone you know because your mum is friends with him, nor because you know people who come along to Church on Sunday morning, not someone you have added on Facebook but you aren’t sure where you met them or quite who they are - but someone who you can actually know.

So really, do you know Jesus? Do you know Jesus as a friend? Can you say, ‘Jesus, I love you” and mean it?

So picture the scene. Jesus is at a wedding. This is the Son of God at a wedding.

The Bible tells us in Colossians that Jesus is, “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” In Jesus all things hold together. He created the world and he sustains the world. Jesus makes the universe happen and keep on happening. But he turns up at a wedding.

This wedding wasn’t a celebrities’ wedding. It was no one important - no one we know. Also, it was in Cana. No one knows where that it (sure they make a bid deal of where they think it was in modern day Israel, but archaeology has drawn a bit of a blank). It was the wedding of no one important in an unimportant place. But the Son of God who created the world and who sustains and holds the universe together was there.

The reason for this is that God thinks ordinary things are important. You might think that you are not that important, you might think that not much is happening in your life right now, but God still wants to show up and do something amazing in you and through you.

God doesn’t make rubbish, and he doesn’t give up on anything he has made. Now I know that stuff might happen which seems to tell you different. You or someone you love gets really ill, a relationship breaks down, you are not sure what to do with your life, you think everyone else is closer to God and more important than you are.

On the other hand you might feel pretty extraordinary right now, and close to God, like things are going ok. But just as the wine ran out, stuff runs out in life: tough times may be around the corner.

God is bothered about that - he wants to be with you no matter how ordinary or extraordinary you think you are.

What is the miracle here? Well, I guess it is obvious: water into wine. Or maybe the real miracle is that the Son of God who created and sustains all things, wants to be involved in your life. Sometimes in a dramatic way, but most often in an ordinary way. Jesus isn’t only going to show up in a hugely life changing way and then the rest of the year you are on your own: God wants to be with you each and every day.

The next miracle in this story is to do with primary love and secondary love. I guess a picture of this is the possible contrast between the inferior quality wine and the best wine that Jesus miraculously produces.

In the day of this wedding there was a tradition that every year at the fermenting of the grapes, in other words at the time of year when the grape harvest was finished and they were preparing the grapes to make wine, the father of the household would take one barrel of wine that he had made and he would set it aside for the marriage of his daughter. He would do this each year from the time she was born until she got married, usually by the time that she was 16, so about 16 barrels of wine.

On that wedding day in Cana it may have been that the guests drank too much, it may have been that the father had forgot to prepare, or had been careless and made a mistake so the wine had gone bad and he didn’t have as much as he should have. Either way the wine ran out.

Someone mentions this to Jesus’ mum who was also at the wedding, and she goes to Jesus and tells him. Jesus says something along the lines of, ‘Sorry mum, why are you telling me this? You know that I am here to die for the sins of humanity not to turn water into wine. But so that you know that I can die for the sins of humanity I will do this.’

And Jesus turns some water into wine. The water was stored in Jewish purification jars. This was water that was used to fulfil the Jewish Law. Jesus was basically saying that he was going to do something which was better than the law, he was going to show us the grace of God.

The wine is a symbol of God’s grace, of a gift which we don’t deserve, God’s love. It is also a sign of Jesus’ blood. Jesus was pointing toward the cross and what he would do for us all.

So, who got to taste the wine? Not the father because he wasn’t prepared and it was his fault that they had run out. Not the guests who had already drunk too much and were slightly drunk. Not those who had been bad in the past week and who didn’t deserve God’s grace? We might think this is the answer. But all of these people got to taste the wine.

Jesus did not put any conditions on who got to taste the wine. And there are no conditions on who gets to experience the grace of God.

God is love and only love. If you are fearful, if you are guilty, if you doubt, if you are insecure, if you think you aren’t worth much, if you are proud, if you are haughty, if you have despair, if you feel alone, if you think you are better than someone else here, none of these things are from a God of love.

Some of you might think you know this already, you might think that it is pretty basic stuff. But stop and ask yourself, ‘How well do I know that I am loved unconditionally?’

This is not secondary love, this is not conditional love, this is not the kind of love which we have loved and which we have experienced. This is not affirmation, affection, sympathy, encouragement and support. These things are love, but they are limited and fragile. This is the kind of love which might be withdrawn, which might get damaged, which might go wrong.

The primary love, the first love, is the love that is offered to us through Christ. Do you know that kind of love, do you know Jesus as a friend? It may be that you don’t. And now is as good a time as ever to say to Jesus, ‘I want to know you as a friend, I want to know that love.’

So let’s pray…

Harry Steele

OUR PRAYERS

We pray for the Church

that it may know its true resources and power are from you;

that it may be enabled

to proclaim your saving power and your love.

Give your Church the ability to be a healing instrument in the world,

to bring peace, and to proclaim your presence.

Silence

Almighty God,

**we know all power comes from you.**

We remember all who struggle for survival,

the poor and the oppressed, the hungry and the homeless,

all who feel powerless.

We ask you to bless all who strive to bring justice and peace to our world.

Silence

Almighty God,

**we know all power comes from you.**

We give thanks for all who have enriched our lives

by their love and goodness.

We ask that your love may be experienced in our homes

and among our loved ones and friends.

We pray for homes where there is conflict, violence or abuse,

especially for any who live in fear or feel unable to change.

Silence

Almighty God,

**we know all power comes from you.**

Give strength to the weak,

refresh the weary,

encourage the fearful

and protect all who are endangered.

We remember friends and loved ones

who are ill or in need of comfort and refreshment.

Silence

Almighty God,

**we know all power comes from you.**

We rejoice that you give us life in all its abundance and life eternal.

We pray for all our loved ones departed that

they may have the fullness of life in your kingdom.

Silence

A prayer concerning the Coronavirus

God of compassion,  
be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.  
in their loneliness, be their consolation;  
in their anxiety, be their hope;  
in their darkness, be their light;  
through him who suffered alone on the cross,  
but reigns with you in glory,  
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

An act of spiritual Communion

My Jesus,   
I believe that You  
are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.   
I love You above all things,   
and I desire to receive You into my soul.   
Since I cannot at this moment  
receive You sacramentally,   
come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.

Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;**

**thy kingdom come; thy will be done;**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our trespasses,**

**as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation;** **but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,**

**the power and the glory,** **for ever and ever.** **Amen.**