

Now may I speak in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This gospel that we've just heard, the story of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, it's only recorded in John's gospel. And it's the first of John's miracle stories, and in many ways it's very different to all the other miracle stories in the gospel. For example, it's the only one in John that's not linked to a block of teaching. Normally Jesus does a miracle and then out of that leads into a sermon. And some have argued that it's a rather frivolous miracle. Nobody's healed, nobody's sins are forgiven, no great teaching point is made. The miracle simply allows the party to continue. But what's most striking to me is not its frivolity, it's more that this is a miracle that goes largely unnoticed. It's not one of those big miracles that lead people to have this different impression of Jesus, this is something on the side that not everybody sees as even miraculous.

Look at the story from the perspective of the master of the banquet, his role is probably a bit like his chief's steward, it's probably a bit like a best man. And anyone who has been a best man ... and I'm talking from experience here, knows that you can't relax until the whole thing is completed, till the reception's completely finished and everybody's gone home, because just when you start enjoying yourself something comes up that you have to deal with. The most peculiar I ever heard was a friend of mine who two days before the wedding, he was the best man and he got a frantic phone call, could he find some fake eyebrows because the groom had lost his eyebrows, they'd been shaved off at his stag party.

Here the groom had all his eyebrows but there was no wine, that was the problem, the wine had run out. And the chief steward, he's faced with this problem, he probably saw a bit of a kerfuffle on the side of this middle age woman and her son engaging in a bit of a dialogue, nothing unusual there, but then the servants come out with six large stone jars filled with excellent wine. And the chief steward, the best man tasted it and liked it. And notice who he goes to thank for the wine. He doesn't go to Jesus and say, "Goodness me, you've produced magnificent wine here." He goes to the groom and he says to the groom, "You've kept the best wine till now." So as far as the chief steward is concerned the only unusual thing that's happened in this story is that the groom has wasted his hard-earned

cash spending a lot of money on lovely wine that everyone's too drunk to appreciate. The best man is completely unaware of Jesus' involvement. As far as he's concerned there's nothing miraculous in this miracle story.

But look from the perspective of the disciples at this story and the effect it had on them. To them this whole incident reveals Jesus' glory. It says, it made them put their faith in Jesus. So what is it that the disciples saw that the best man didn't see? The disciples saw where the new wine had come from. The disciples saw that what was really unusual about the wine wasn't that it was of high quality but that a few minutes earlier it'd been water, that was the amazing thing. The disciples recognized Jesus' miraculous work. To the best man the wine was good, but nothing particular out of the ordinary. The disciples saw a miracle, they saw something different. They saw Jesus at work and they put their faith in him as they saw his glory revealed.

I'll come back to that later, but it's annual meeting day when we start to think about our church community. I'm mindful that there are different perspectives, different ways of looking at the church. To people who walk past and never come into the church, the church to them probably looks like a building for a kind of religious club, a place where likeminded people meet and gather to indulge their particular ecclesiastical preferences, nothing particularly special or miraculous happens there. But to those of us on the inside the church it can look very different. What binds us together isn't anything that we might have in common, apart from the fact that we all gather here to worship the God who made us, the creator of the universe. And there is no higher calling on anybody than to do that. That's what we were created to do. We worship God and we join with others in the building of his kingdom. So we need to be serious about our vision as a church. We're involved in some serious stuff. Our vision isn't simply to keep the show on the road, or to keep the building looking nice, we have a bigger, broader, bolder vision. That's what we might be mentioning in the annual meeting later on.

Back to this story. I want to draw out three things, which I think the story tells us about our church community, or any church community, any community that recognizes in Jesus the glory of God and seeks to follow him. First, this is a story of transformation. It's not like the miracle of the loaves and the fishes where Jesus makes more and more. It's not a miracle of

multiplication, it's a miracle of transformation, that what was once water gets transformed into wine.

And what Jesus does here is he takes something ordinary, he takes what was lying around and makes it a difference. And there's probably something significant about the fact that Jesus took six stone jars, because six is not in that time recognized as a perfect number, seven, 12 those are numbers of completeness and wholeness, but six isn't. Six is an imperfect number, so Jesus takes the six stone jars that are just there with water in and that's what he uses to work his miracle. He takes what is at hand. He takes what is common and raises it to the excellence of the wine. And Jesus is still in the business of transformation. The Christian experience is fundamentally one of transformation. Those who are lost can be found. Those who are spiritually dead can find new life through the operation of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. That's the Spirit's work, to take what is there, to take even us ordinary folk and work that miracle of transformation.

And second, I was struck in the story that Jesus took all the jars. He could presumably if this was just some mere conjuring trick have taken one jar, or two, but he uses all six even though that provides far more than he needs. He takes the six, and I think that brings out a lesson that's there at the forefront of our epistle reading. St. Paul writes this in the lesson we just heard. "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same spirit. And there are varieties of services, but the same Lord. And there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good." Note the inclusivity of the language there, to each and everyone. St. Paul's writing to the church and he's saying, we all have a part to play. Belonging to a church is not a spectator sport. God has given each of us a gift, and the gift needs to be used for the benefit of the whole community.

Finally, this is a story of abundance and we can't fail to notice that. It's not just that the wine is of great quality that's of significance in this story, it's the sheer abundance, the large amount that is created. 180 gallons, if you do the math. That's a ridiculous amount. No wedding party could drink their way through that. They might have fun trying. An abundance should be a characteristic of church life, and we have a flavor of that here at St. James. Our wonderful flower guild, are mistresses of abundance. We could presumably just

stick a few plastic flowers in a vase and have them at the front of the church week on end, but no, we have a large team of very skilled people who each week go out and buy the loveliest fresh flowers to adorn our altar, to beautify our worship. And look at the choir behind me, we could just have a couple of singers to lead the hymns, but no, we invest significant resources to have this magnificent sound coming from our choir. We want to give of our best in worship. As I've said it's the highest calling on anyone. We want to give of our best in worship, to do it as well as we can. There's no greater calling in life so our worship demands the best that we can give. Now I'm sure there's a point where abundance can turn to frivolity, but we're not there yet.

And we should aspire to be abundant in many things, in our love for one another, in our forgiveness. Abundance should characterize all that we do. And I'm hoping too that abundance can come to characterize our giving, and our generosity. I'm hoping that this year we at St. James can give away at least 10% of our income. And last week we heard from our outreach partners, and I'm delighted that those partnerships are being strengthened as we journey together. We don't journey as an isolated community, we are part of the body of Christ, we journey with others, we are part of a Jesus movement, and we want to invest abundantly in our partners.

So as we draw to a close let me return to that question which I raised earlier, a question I want to leave with you. So this common Christian life that we share, this life of abundance and transformation, it's rooted in the person of Jesus Christ and our response to him. Are we like the best man at the wedding who failed to see anything special about Jesus and His activities, or are we like the disciples who at that wedding recognized His glory and turned to Him as the source of abundant life?

Amen.