

People often speak of long goodbyes, but I feel that we've had a rather long hello. It's wonderful to finally be here after weeks and months of praying and preparation, and I want to thank the wardens, the Vestry, the search committee, in fact everyone who we've met on our first few days in La Jolla who's been so welcoming and made my wife, Laura, who's here today, and I feel so welcome amongst you. It's been wonderful, so thank you for the warmth of that welcome.

As many of you know, we've come from London, and we've had a very long and happy ministry there. It was difficult to leave, but I have learned this week that if you're going to leave London for California, January is a good time to do it, because we left rather grey, cold skies for the beautiful crisp, blue skies here in La Jolla. I know you have had rain, but rain is an event here, whereas it's a way of life in London. It's lovely to be here.

I want us to turn together at that gospel reading from John Chapter Two, the wonderful reading of Jesus' ... What happened there at that wedding in Cana of Galilee. I want to share a thought that I hadn't noticed in the reading until this week: there are two very clear and different perspectives going on in that story. If you asked the characters who were there what had happened in that wedding at Cana in Galilee, you'd have got two very different accounts. If you look in the story, there are suggestions of who knows what, which gives rise to two very different perspectives. There's the perspective of the disciples. They saw what happened at the wedding as a miraculous sign, a sign that revealed Jesus' glory, and that reading ends with saying that the disciples believed in Jesus. This is right at the beginning of His ministry. There was enough that happened at that wedding in Galilee for them to put their faith in Him.

Then there's a very different perspective going on in this story. Still people who were there, but if you ask the chief steward, who's mentioned in the story, what had happened, he wouldn't think that anything miraculous happened in the story at all. It was just a strange event at a wedding in Galilee.

Let me begin with this latter perspective. Look at the story through the eyes of the chief steward who features in this story. The steward's probably a bit like a best man which we're familiar with at a wedding. I've been a best man. I know that it's hard work. You can't relax until the whole day is over, because you just don't know what's going to go wrong. You feel responsible. The strangest thing I've ever heard of a best man being

asked to do is a friend of mine who was called up on the morning of the wedding by the groom saying, "Can you please provide me with some false eyebrows, because they've been shaved off at the stag night?" The bride was insisting that he appeared with eyebrows for the photos.

Here the problem's a bit more prosaic. They've run out of wine. The chief steward's probably aware of a bit of a kerfuffle over one side when a middle aged woman is talking with her son. Just as things are getting desperate, the servants appear carrying six large stone jars filled with wine. The best man, the chief steward, tastes it and likes it. Notice who he thanks for the wine. He doesn't thank Jesus. He thanks the bridegroom, because that's all that he has seen. He thanks the bridegroom and says, "You've kept the best until last." As far as the chief steward is concerned, the only unusual thing that's happened in this wedding is that the bridegroom has been foolish enough to spend his hard earned cash on great wine that no one was ready to appreciate, because they were already too sloshed. He was completely unaware of Jesus' involvement. As far as this chief steward is concerned, this isn't a miracle story. This is a story of a foolhardy groom who's wasted his money.

Look at the story from a different perspective, the perspective of the disciples. Then the whole incident as I've said reveals Jesus' glory. It was enough to make them put their faith in Him. What have they seen that the chief steward didn't see? Well, they saw where the wine had come from. The disciples saw that what was really unusual about the wine wasn't its quality. It was a few minutes earlier it had been water. The disciples recognize Jesus' miraculous work. To the steward the wine was just good, but nothing particularly out of the ordinary. The disciples saw it as a miracle. They saw something different.

I want to stay with this idea of what the disciples saw and reflect on it for a moment and think of what it might mean for us here at St. James as we begin this new chapter together.

I'm struck by the fact that the disciples got a glimpse of the abundance that comes with Jesus. There have been scholars who've been troubled by this story in John Chapter Two. They dismissed it as a rather frivolous story that can't possibly be part of the original Jesus tradition. They would point to the fact that in all the other miracle stories in John's gospel, they're all followed by a very serious theological discourse. Not this one which stands on its own, and they might think isolated in the text. Really they would say, "Why would

Jesus use a miracle to insure that wedding had enough wine?" And not just any vin de table, six jars of the highest quality wine. That's 180 gallons of claret. It's a ridiculous amount. There's no wedding party in the world that can get through that amount of wine. I can see some people here thinking that might be a challenge, but as far as I'm aware, that's too much to drink at any gathering.

But I don't think this is a frivolous story. It's a story of abundance. It's not an isolated story. It fits with lots of accounts in the gospel where there's an enormous generosity, an overflowing, an abundance, in what Jesus does. We're told later in John that Jesus came to bring life in all its fullness, and this story shows what that fullness looks like.

And I hope that in our time together we'll experience something of the abundance and the joy which Jesus brings. It's saying that I'm not promising that every parish party's going to be provided with vast amounts of very expensive wine, it's more than that. It's saying there's a fullness, a richness to the common life that we as followers of Jesus can share. I'm looking forward to living that abundant life with you.

What's true of the body of Christ is also true of individual believers. All the miracle stories have a point. They're not simply magical stories. Then this one is saying that whenever Jesus comes into someone's life there comes a new quality which is like turning water into wine. Without Jesus, life can be dull, stale, and flat, but with His coming, life becomes vivid, sparkling, and exciting.

Remember John who's writing this. He's an old man by now, and he's had many years to reflect on what he saw in the ministry of Jesus. You can hear him almost summing it up at this point saying, "Wherever Jesus went, things came to life. It was like turning water into wine."

I am hoping and praying that in our time together, in the years to come, that many people will be able to say that they know what it's like to have that abundant life, what it feels like when Jesus comes in us and turns that water into wine.

Something else that the disciples saw was Jesus taking something ordinary and making it something extraordinary. Jesus didn't conjure up the wine. He started with the six jars of water. What we see here is a wondrous transformation. Jesus worked with what they had. They had jars. They had water. That's what He transformed. That was His starting point.

As I begin my ministry here at St. James, I'm struck by the enormous potential of the church here. The starting point is so rich. Great people, wonderful music, a fantastic building, a blessed tradition. When I came for interview and met the vestry and the search committee, there was a sense of a renewed energy that is starting to emerge the last year or so.

The task now is to commit that potential to Jesus and to see what with Him we can do with it. What transformation He will work with what we offer Him. What transformation can come as Jesus works amongst us by His Spirit?

I don't know the answer to that question, but I'm excited to find out. One story this morning - one story, two perspectives. Let's pray that when we're telling the story of St. James in a few years' time looking back, we're telling it from the perspective of the amazing things that Jesus has done amongst us, the wondrous transformation that He's done with the things that we've offered Him. Amen.

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