

Address: Ann

We can just imagine the scene; the guests with their finest clothes, the food and wine flowing, the whole village rejoicing at this great event. Everyone knew what to expect and there would be seven days of this merry-making! It was probably an arranged marriage and by Jewish Law it would be held on a Wednesday. There would be a very elaborate feast and then the wedding ceremony itself. After that the couple would be escorted to the new home by the longest route so that as many people as possible could wish the couple well. The bride and groom then kept open house for a week and were treated like a king and queen. It was a very happy time in an era of deprivation. It was to this scene that Jesus and his disciples arrived.

Jesus had only just begun his ministry and had only the first few disciples. How he came to be at the wedding we do not know but it appears that Mary had something to do with the family and it has been suggested that she was the aunt of the bridegroom.

There is no mention of Joseph and it is assumed that by now Mary was a widow. I wonder what she thought about how her son had grown and had now started a public ministry?

The wedding was going well. The food was in abundance, everyone was happy and the music was playing. Then a whisper started: the wine was running out. At this stage if there had been a wedding planner (and who would want to organise an insignificant village wedding?) they would have disappeared very quickly because to run out of wine was a social disgrace and would taint the family for many years to come. Mary must have heard these whisperings and decided that Jesus would be able to help.

I wonder why she thought this? She told Jesus that the wine was running out. His reply seems to be very harsh as he addresses her as 'Woman' but when looked at in context it was a term of respect, much like our 'lady'. Jesus had obviously not gone to the

wedding in order to do a miracle but the need arose and that is true today as much as then; he helps when the need arises.

Although Mary perhaps did not get the reaction she was hoping for, she trusted that Jesus could make the situation better and turned to him and believed even when the request was seemingly refused; she trusted. This event shows much of the nature of Jesus. He enjoyed the wedding and the rejoicing; he was not a party pooper! He was in an ordinary setting, in a home and God is in ordinary things. He saved the family from hurt and showed understanding and kindness in that situation as he does today.

John gives detailed information because he was partly writing for the Jews but also for the Greeks and he wanted them to understand what the water jars symbolised. The water was used for the purification rites and for washing after a long journey, when people would be dusty and tired walking through the desert as well as for drinking. The jars would have contained about 180 gallons, which would be an excessive amount of wine

Mary told the stewards to do whatever Jesus told them which suggests that she had some authority in the matter of the wedding. And that is what happened. The jars were filled and the jugs used to pour the wine were taken to the chief steward and the wine tasted. It was the best he had ever had and said that the best had been saved to the last.

The people who knew what had happened must have been amazed! Perhaps for Mary it was no more than she expected; Jesus' new disciples must have been perplexed; who was this man they had aligned themselves with? The servants and the chief steward must have been puzzled but were possibly too busy to think too much about it then but later? John states that the disciples believed and this was the first sign that Jesus performed, out of many.

So what does this story mean for us? Mary said, 'Do whatever he says'. This is such an important concept of the Christian life. How often do we do 'whatever he says'? Jesus responded to a need

with compassion and that is what he does for us. Sometimes we can be very despondent, especially when our prayers are not answered but God knows what we need and what is good for us. So often we forget Him and think that we know better than he does. A poem my mother-in-law often quoted.

Not 'til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned
Oft' times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.

Jesus changed the water to wine and he can change our lives into a rich fulfilment of what we are meant to be but we need to follow Mary's advice and do whatever he says. In one of the books I read during the preparation of this talk it stated:

As we grow older we are prone to lose our youthful enthusiasm and are tempted to believe that the good times are over. We must remember the words of the steward 'you have saved the best till now'. So whatever our age or circumstances we will always have the compassion of Jesus in abundance and new ways and opportunities will present themselves to us.

Let us pray:

Unchanging God, make us open to change and prepared for challenge. Your love brings hope from despair and joy from disaster. As we grow through all the stages of our lives may our faith grow stronger and our love for you never waver. Amen.