

## **MORE THAN A WEDDING**

I remember my brother's wedding in 1952 – I was 8 and a junior bridesmaid. I had conned Mum into letting me have white court shoes which pinched – didn't like the other style. The reception was at the Maple Leaf Café downstairs in Rundle Street and I cried when I wasn't allowed to go with Bill and Lois on their honeymoon. There was no wine at that wedding – all teetotalers. There was wine at the one Jesus attended.

An ancient Jewish wedding was preceded by a betrothal, which followed the preparation of a marriage contract or covenant, presented by the groom to the bride and her father. Included in this was the bride price to compensate the bride's parents for the cost of raising her. To see if the proposal was accepted, the young man would pour a cup of wine for his beloved and wait to see if she would drink it. If she did, they would be betrothed. He would give her gifts and then leave. The young woman would then wait for his return.

Before leaving, the groom would say to her, 'I am going to prepare a place for you, and I will return for you when it is ready.' (Doesn't that sound familiar? We use these words that Jesus said at funerals. How wonderful to link the bridegroom's promise with Jesus' preparation of our heavenly home when we move into the next life.) The groom would return home to build a honeymoon room. He would not skimp on the work and his father would have to approve it before it was declared finished. If asked the date of his wedding, he would reply, 'Only my father knows.' Doesn't that ring bells again? Jesus' disciples asked him when he would return to earth and Jesus replied, 'Only my Father knows.' (Mark 13.32)

When the wedding chamber was ready the bridegroom would collect his bride. The bride to be would have kept a lamp and her veil beside her bed while she was waiting for him. Her bridesmaids would have plenty of oil for their lamps. When the groom and his wedding party arrived at her father's house the sound of a shofar or ram's horn would be heard. The ceremony itself was called the Chuppa, which means 'canopy' and the bride and groom would stand under the canopy for all to see. Then she would be taken to her inlaws for a 7day honeymoon. During this time everyone would have been celebrating and after that the Marriage Supper would begin. Jesus was one of the guests at the Cana wedding, about 7kms away from Nazareth, and he and his mother well knew the need for enough refreshment for a long feast. But the wine ran out!

The actual transformation of water into wine can be seen as literal or an allegory. The good news and hope are in the words of the Governor of the Feast or the emcee, 'Everyone serves the good wine first and the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' (Jn. 2:10) God cannot give or send bad things to anyone – it is against God's nature. God is love, only the best for each one of us.

But, there is a strange inference in Jesus' words when Mary asks him to put the situation right. He calls her, 'Dear lady'. One commentator calls the next

part of the conversation between mother and son, banter. It's between people who know each other very well. She and he share the awareness of his messianic mission and her request is to playfully tell Jesus to get on with his mission and not just impress the guests with a special effect. Jesus acknowledges Mary's request by saying that it's not the right time for him to begin his real messianic mission. Mary simply says to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

Jesus asks the servants to fill up the empty jars with water. When they pour it into people's cups it is wine – c. 800 bottles of wine. The servants are the first to see the change of refreshment, not the parents or MC – a classic reversal which we come to realise is a principal of Jesus ministry. And there is great relief amidst the people who may have otherwise thought that running out of wine at a wedding would have meant a lifetime of bad luck. Any experience of Jesus is transformational – Jesus continues to change our lives into that which is God-given.

And there is now more than enough wine just as there is more than enough grace and love for all.

The next logical thought for me is a contemporary question – wedding or marriage? Interesting, we do not celebrate a marriage anniversary; we do a wedding. A wedding is a public ceremony. A marriage begins when a couple is wedded and it relates to a relatively private life within a home. Christian marriage, designed for companionship and intimacy, has achievable ideals. Simply, it is placing the other before oneself. Respect is a particularly important quality in today's western lifestyle where work, sport and play fight it out for supremacy.

The miracle in our gospel story is that God takes ordinary people, ordinary things, ordinary events and changes them into gifts of love and grace. And here in church as the wine is carried from person to person, we marvel at the taste of God's grace. As the best wine is left until last, think what a future we all have in the company of Jesus. May we all 'taste and see that the Lord is good'. AMEN

John 2: 1-11

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