

‘On the third day, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee.’

During the current lockdown weddings can only happen in exceptional circumstances. Nevertheless, I expect that you familiar with weddings.

How many weddings have you been to in your life?

Can you remember what all the brides wore?

Can you remember the music that was played?

Can you remember the songs you danced to at the reception?

Whether you enjoy weddings, or dread them, they make an impression. You can recall the details of a wedding many years afterwards: how the bride looked in her dress; what was on the menu at the reception; who caught the bouquet...

A wedding is not just any old day. It is a day of goodwill, abundance and joy. Despite the army of wedding professionals waiting to capitalize on your special day, a wedding remains the basic image we have of things turning out all right in the end.

Which is exactly why this wedding, with its water-to-wine miracle, marks the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry in the Gospel of John. John is setting the scene for everything that comes after. John is telling us what he thinks that life as a follower of Jesus is really all about.

Marcus Borg writes in his book titled simply *Jesus*: ‘The story of Jesus is about a wedding. And more: it is a wedding at which the wine never runs out. More: it is a wedding at which the best wine is saved for last.’

John clearly thinks that this is a very important story for understanding who Jesus is. And yet this is a story that occurs only in John’s Gospel. The other Gospels make no mention of Jesus turning water into wine.

Our lectionary runs in a 3-year cycle — one year each for Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John doesn’t get a year to himself: instead we get little bits and pieces of John in each of the three years. Where Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell variations of the same basic story about Jesus, John goes off in his own direction.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are more narrative, sticking to the facts of Jesus’ life and inserting Jesus’ teaching as it was preserved in early manuscripts. John is different: he is more interpretive and intellectual.

John wants to show us not just what Jesus says and does, but who Jesus is and what Jesus means. What Jesus means is life, joy, abundance, and peace. John is convinced that the Christian life is meant to be a comedy, not a tragedy. Despite how dark things might seem out there in the world, despite the fact that the path to life will lead Jesus — and us — through death, despite all of this: things will turn out all right in the end. God is in control, leading us to light and life in Jesus.

John drops a hint about the meaning of Jesus in the way he begins the story about the wedding in Cana: ‘On the third day.’ We might ask, ‘The third day since when?’ But think again, what else took place on the third day?

‘On the third day’ is the clue to the resurrection and the transformation that it brought. This story about the water turned into wine reveals how the resurrected Christ has transformed the whole of life.

In the same way that the first line of the first chapter of John, 'In the beginning was the Word,' calls to mind the beginning of everything in the book of Genesis, 'on the third day' points to the climax and resolution of Jesus' story. On the third day is life, and that is where we are called to live.

One of the clues John gives us about who Jesus is, is the specific mention of the 'six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification.' These water jars are a sign that God is doing a new thing from within the old Jewish system of religion. He is bringing purification to Israel and to the whole world in a totally new way.

This story is about the contrast between the way of salvation in the old religion and the way of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Ritual water becomes gospel wine. There is a new way to find forgiveness and new life, and it is Jesus who acts to bring about this transformation.

These stone water jars were supposed to contain between twenty and thirty gallons each. Just think about it, the wedding guests have already consumed the family's entire supply of drink. Now, they are presented with no less than one hundred and twenty gallons of new wine! Surely, they did not need quite as much as that. This great abundance, this extreme generosity, is another clue about the character of God and the immensity of his love for us.

Furthermore, this new wine is not just any old plonk. When the steward has tasted the new wine, he comments to the bridegroom, 'you have kept the good wine until now.' Despite God being active in the old wine of the people of Israel, God's full riches are now poured out in the new wine of the death of Christ. There is nothing to surpass the quality of this most precious gift from God.

As far as we know from John's account, the steward did not know what had happened, neither did the bridegroom, nor the guests. But those who had eyes to see, the disciples, saw the glory of God revealed in Jesus' actions at the wedding feast, and John tells us, 'his disciples believed in him.'

The transformation from water into wine is meant by John to signify the effect that Jesus can have on people's lives. As John later proclaims, 'Jesus came that we might have life in all its fullness.'

The marriage supper to which God invites us is meant to bring us pleasure and joy. The life God intends for us is one filled with beauty and contentment and all good things.

As we see at this wedding feast where Jesus reveals himself, the day of banquet and feasting is also the day of reconciliation, joy, and peace.

Only when there is enough to go around, plenty to be shared freely, can old resentments be washed away, only then can new companionship begin to grow.

Despite John's tendency to show us the otherworldly, mysterious and ethereal side of Jesus, this miracle demonstrates that the Christian life is grounded in simple, daily pleasures like good food and wine: following Jesus is about earth as well as heaven.

God became incarnate not to pull us out of our bodies and into heaven, but rather to bring heaven down to us, to bring the peace and abundance that is God's intention for all people and all places into every corner of human life.

This is why we pray 'thy kingdom come.' Amen.