

The Wedding at Cana John 2:1-11 John Beckett

21st January 2018

3rd Sunday of Epiphany

Until preparing for today, I don't think I'd appreciated enough the word **'transform'** and how TRANSFORMATION lies at the heart of the whole gospel message.

I did a google search on the word 'transform'

First advert up was for Cosmetic surgery, encouraging me to book in for breast surgery...

But the dictionary definition is this:

To completely change the appearance or character of something so that it is improved.

Transformation is Change for the better

And gospel transformation has nothing whatever to do with cosmetic surgery, with appearances, but everything to do with the character, the very nature of who we are.

The miracle at Cana is all about that transformation.

If chapter 1 of John's gospel was remarkable – where John reminds us of all the different names and titles of Jesus - , chapter two is similarly so – beginning with the 1st of the stories or SIGNS – like clues – that back up the truth of those names to show us who Jesus really is.

Verses 1 – 11 describe the Wedding at Cana – with water transformed into wine –

In the second half of chapter 2, John, unlike the other gospel writers, places Jesus's cleansing of the Temple – **do you remember?** - where he drives out those who were turning his father's house into a market place,

adding as he left, a powerful hint at another transformation to come: "destroy this Temple I will raise it again in three days".

In Chapter 3 the transformations continue:

Jesus explains to Nicodemus about the need for a new spiritual birth, of being born again to enter, or even to see the Kingdom of God.

In Chapter 4, he tells the Samaritan woman about the time where worship will be transformed – no longer in one place, but anywhere, in Spirit and in truth.

Transformation

Transformation

Let's take a closer look at today's reading:

"On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee." 'On the third day' does that ring any bells?

John is probably already dropping pointers to the resurrection for us.

A wedding in Cana – probably a village 9 miles north of Nazareth - would have included the whole community. Jesus was there, and maybe there was a little embarrassment that he appeared to have quite a few plus ones with him! Certainly Mary felt the need to ask Jesus to do something when the wine ran out, though, in any event, she would have wanted to do all she could to save the host and newlyweds from the social disgrace of running out of wine.

Do you notice how Mary has such confidence in Jesus's ability to act and give instructions to the servants "do whatever he tells you"?

And they did. The six stone water jars that were there were used for washing – to enable the guests to be ceremonially clean according to the Jewish laws.

Jesus told the servants to fill them with water – and that was a lot of water – 20 – 30 gallons each, that's about 650 litres. Which means that was transformed into a lot of wine!

How many bottles in 650 litres? 850 bottles worth - that's going on for 5000 glasses of wine.

And good wine at that!

What a miracle of transformation!

What a miracle of God's abundance and love of party, that reveals Jesus in God-sized glory –as Heaven touches earth.

And while it was only seen by a few people that day, it was enough for this first disciples to put their faith in him.

This is no superficial change. This is real Transformation:

- 1 of water into wine
- 2 from shame to celebration
- 3 from empty to overflowing –
- 4 from human sized problem to a God sized solution
- 5 from ordinary to glorious
- 6 transformation from the old way of living as God's people to a new way of living – the use of the ceremonial water jars here are symbolic of the old covenant promise and the change to good wine is of how forgiveness and holiness is now freely available to all in the new covenant promises in Jesus by his death and resurrection.
- 7 and lastly – this transformation of water to wine at a wedding remind us of the ultimate transformation we are promised, from death to life -- where everyone is invited to the wedding Banquet - not in Cana of Galilee - but to the heavenly one where Jesus is this time the groom and God's people, his church, you and I – are the bride! - such that the abundance of wine, merriment and partying at Cana are the perfect prelude.

The amazing thing is that this transformation and joy are available for us too. That's one reason why we chose 'Knowing God's joy' to be one of our 'values'...

Nothing like cosmetic surgery, but real deep down change for the better.

It's happening here.

Faithful people at St Matthias have served, given, prayed laboured, and waited for this time of refreshing and renewal: as we share something of God's delight as new people begin and continue their journeys of faith with us. E.g.

'I've really felt welcome by you all. I've started my journey with God now and can't wait to learn more'.

It's been happening here – the lives of three homeless people this week have been transformed by being offered a new home and employment, all as a result of the care and love and support of Christ's body in action through the Night Shelter project.

It's happening in Nazareth!

Last week some of us were able to hear from Paul and Tessa of how it was felt that Jesus had left the hospital they visited there. Yet, as the faithful hospital leaders, and the ministry team with them invited Jesus back in and went around praying with staff and patients, how God honored their obedience and faith, with the reports of how the whole hospital was transformed.

What about you?

I don't think it is meant to be a sign that whatever our problems, Jesus will miraculously sort them out; but it is a sign that he will bring transformation to any situation.

I hope that this miracle at Cana of Galilee reminds you of what you know of God's delight in you as his child, at your joy at being forgiven, at your transformation into the person he wants you to be, and at the transformations he is enabling you to be part of.

But if you haven't known any or enough of that transformation, today might be a good day to ask why that might be?

Did you notice how although Jesus was invited to the wedding, it was only when he was invited into the situation and when the servants simply did what he said that the transformation and the joy resulted?

They didn't know how it would all work out, but they trusted him, and ended up celebrating with him as his glory was revealed.

It's as if you're driving a car, and you have Jesus in the boot. You break down, but knowing nothing about cars, in desperation you get Jesus out of the boot to help you. He does, but as you try to return him to the boot, he indicates he'd rather sit in the back seat.

Reluctantly you agree – telling him to make sure he keeps his head down!

You break down again. Again, you get Jesus out to help get the car going again. This time he indicates he'd much rather sit in the passenger seat.

Ok, you say. But after the third breakdown is sorted by Jesus, he simply asks whether it wouldn't be better for you to let him drive?

It makes me wonder:

Jesus may be in my life but have I really asked him to transform things, to transform me? *In other words is Jesus just still in the boot of the car, or do I let him take the steering wheel?*

We cannot be wine if we are determined to stay as water!

We certainly cannot enjoy the wine if we are always wishing we were still water!

Remember another one of Jesus's illustrations about wine? - the new wine has to be put into new wineskins.

It is true that even when we have surrendered to Jesus, we can have tough, dry periods when God seems far away – there isn't time this morning to explore that much further - but we are called to continue to trust, to wait for Him to put things in place, like waiting for that desert to transform into a carpet of flower.

Maybe it's not the changing so much that worries you, but the fear of being overwhelmed by the joy that comes with it?

David Ford in his excellent book "the Shape of Living" explores how we sometimes try to contain joy. But when it comes to resurrection joy he recommends that we succumb to being overwhelmed by it.

"To be transformed by joy means trust, even surrender, and that is a massive risk. There is no avoiding risk, and once the process of transformation begins we cannot tell where it will lead..... We need to face it is a joy that can transform a whole life, testing us by giving us something, someone, uncontainable."

Let's just go for it! Embrace the new life Jesus offers us! Allow the joy to transform you, to overwhelm you.

Follow the example of those first disciples as they saw God's glory in Jesus and put their faith in him, trust him, do as he tells us.

And join in the celebration at all the transformation he brings about in us and through us.

Indeed we are invited to Join in the celebration right now, as we share in bread and wine –a foretaste of the new wine at the Wedding banquet in heaven.

Prayer: Surrender; Receive, Welcome

PRAYER Ephesians 3:20 as blessing prayer at the end of the service

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.