

Together with the parable of the Prodigal Son, the wedding at Cana is my favourite Gospel story. But for reasons other than you may suspect. There is a clear connection in both stories. In both a feast is involved to mark a welcome, a reconciliation and reunion. There is a celebration of love. While all the Gospels, in a metaphorical sense, offer us good wine, John provides us with a special vintage. All four Gospel writers are writing post-Easter, drawing on history remembered but also interpreting the life of the historical Jesus from their knowledge and experience of one who is already the risen Lord. John seems to want us to meet the risen Lord right away.

Today's Gospel reading provides us with a true story, but it is written in metaphorical language. It follows the example of Jesus himself as he tried to teach people the mysteries of the kingdom of God in words they would understand. He spoke in parables, metaphorical stories describing profound truths, also drawing people into the story and connecting it with their lives.

And that is what is confronting us in the Gospel today. The story we have read is more than an actual wedding, the sort that most of us will no doubt have attended frequently and most likely experienced for ourselves as a bride or groom. The real miracle being described is not actual water being turned into actual wine. If it was, it might well cheer the hearts of the wine lovers among us. But we need to recognize that the incarnation, God coming among us in human form was not about the appearance in history of a man who was fully equipped with superhuman powers, so that he could manipulate nature and matter exactly as he liked. Such a being would not be a *human* being. And such thinking would take us into the realm of legend and unreality, creating a positively superstitious attitude towards Jesus. That was not John's or any of the other Gospel writers' intentions at all. They came to bring us good news about the closeness of God to us, God's solidarity with us, demonstrated uniquely in the down to earth, full human Jesus of Nazareth.

John, most especially, wants to show the total significance of Jesus for us, the readers. Having used up the first chapter to introduce Jesus, in a rather different way than the other Gospel writers, John begins chapter two with some very important words: 'On the third day.....there was a wedding.' Indeed, there was! We come together to celebrate it every Sunday, the Day of Resurrection.

In this teachings Jesus often described the Kingdom of God as like a wedding feast. There was nothing new about that as the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, used similar imagery to describe God's desired relationship with the people Israel. But the nation and people continued to fall short of what God had called them to be. Their love for God had dried up, or as John puts it in the language of parable or metaphor, they had run out of wine, and their wine had been inadequate anyway.

The nation's religion had become like those stone water jars: empty, rigid, with the people's hearts hardened like stone. There were six jars, one short of seven, the biblical number which represents completeness or perfection.

Into this sorry nation comes Jesus. He comes to change the situation. The other significant guest is the mother of Jesus. John never names her. He simply calls her the mother of Jesus. In this story she is presented as something more than his human mother Mary, yet it is faithful to what we know of Mary from elsewhere in the Gospels. Here, she symbolises the tradition and background from which Jesus springs: the remnant in Israel that had remained faithful to God and longed for the kingdom of God to be established. Hers is the voice of the Israel represented by the great prophets, that says to Jesus, 'they have run out of wine.'.....and, 'do whatever he tells you.' He will be the one to change the situation; he will enable the marriage, the full union of God and his people, to take place.

The stone jars are filled with water, which is all the people could offer. The water becomes wine. The water and the failed wine of the old, failed religion are replaced. Into God's tired and dried-up vineyard of Israel comes Jesus, the true vine, as John later calls him. He is himself that new wine, he is the best wine. He establishes the new covenant between God and his people. What existed before was limited, like a betrothal, a courtship and a fraught one at that. Now the marriage has been enacted. And this marriage was solemnised and celebrated on the third day, Easter, when Jesus, having given his life so completely with the wine of his own blood, passed over to the eternal realm of God, leaving us with the pathway to follow him there.

It is heady stuff. But this Gospel story has an important message for all whose relationship with God has become empty, tired, dried up. It is about the

difference Jesus makes to the journey of faith, to our lives, our relationships, and all our experiences – if, when.....we invite him to be our life guest, indeed to be the centre of our lives. Jesus is the one who can transform our experience, give it purpose, meaning and direction.

On the third day there was a wedding. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples were there also. And we too are there with them as we share in this feast of salvation now, this Eucharist, celebrating that through Jesus, his life, death and resurrection, God has met us, God is wedded to us and has brought us home to his life and love which is eternal. To this wedding feast all are invited. It is our mission, as those who have tasted the difference that Christ makes, to extend that invitation in every way we can, as we share in his work of drawing all people to himself.

The new wine of God's kingdom, God's life and love, is freely available for all to drink. And it will never run out.