

Sunday 21st January 2024
Morning Worship

“Do whatever He tells you”

John 2:1-11
Rev 19:6-10
Gen 14:17-20

Preamble:

This week I came across a helpful note on ‘how to listen to a sermon’. It could be summarised like this

- *Believe God has something to say to you – expect God to meet you*
- *Work out one point to take away. Remember, this is a point for **you**, not someone else!*
- *Afterwards think, pray, maybe write it down, but most of all - do it.*

Loving God,

I believe that you have something to say to me this morning

Please help me to work out what it is

And then please help me to respond in the way you want me to.

Amen

So with that in mind, let’s begin.....

Some years ago, I went to a “Bible story-telling Workshop”.

It was an interesting day - first, we learnt some “theory”, where we discovered that the key to story-telling is drawing people into the story that you are relating. And then we had a go, listening to a folk tale and trying to ‘tell’ it for ourselves – more difficult than it seemed! And then we had to prepare to tell the story of the Wedding at Cana from the perspective of one of the participants. I have absolutely no idea which character I chose or what I said. What I do remember was one man who had us all totally absorbed in the story from the point of view of – the stone water jars. What genius! And for me, this story will forever be associated with that day.

If you’re familiar with John’s gospel, you may be aware that it “works” at different levels. You can read it simply as a story of Jesus’ life, ministry, death and resurrection, but if you scratch beneath the surface you can see that every part is carefully constructed to point to Jesus being not just a good man, or a great teacher, but the Son of God, so that we may believe “and so have life in his name.” It’s a bit like a detective story – with clues hidden in plain sight all over the place.

This passage no exception. Its underlying message is about the wonderful new life that Jesus brings through his death and resurrection. It’s as different from a life without God as washing-up water is from the best wine – and when we believe in Jesus it becomes ours. Not just after we die, but now – the joy of knowing God’s love, mercy, forgiveness and peace,

and the privilege of working with God to make these real in our own lives, the life of our community and the life of the world.

But today I'd mostly like to focus on the story, and on what God might want to say to us through it, by looking at the actions of the participants in it. Ordinary people at a wedding. Anyone here never been to a wedding?

These people could be us.

So let's see what is happening in the story. It might be helpful if you can find the reading on your service sheet.

The first person we meet is Mary. Last time we heard from her she was a scared teenage mother having to flee to Egypt because King Herod was trying to kill her son. Here we find "grown up Mary" – probably in her mid-forties and still as faithful and as feisty as ever. John tells us first that *she* is invited to the wedding, then adding that Jesus and his disciples are *also* invited. Clearly a lady you don't mess with! Just as she was there at the cross, and then with the other disciples after the resurrection, here she is at the first of the 'signs' or miracles apparently kick-starting it all into action. A woman with the compassion to draw Jesus' attention to the situation, and with the authority to give the servants the key line
"do whatever he tells you to"

There's a challenge - "do whatever he tells you to"

So, let's see what the participants do in response to Jesus words and actions...

...the first of which is to tell the servants to fill the stone water jars, then draw some out and take it to the steward....

And the servants do as Jesus tells them...

They **fill** the huge water jars "up to the brim". There's something about being with Jesus which encourages them to over flowing generosity.

They **draw out** some of the water "that had become wine"

And they **take** it to the steward (the master of ceremonies.)

And although it's not expressed in the text, they also **know** where the wine came from. They know that it was something to do with Jesus. They don't appear to tell the steward, but they do tell someone - otherwise how is it in the story?

They listen, do as they are told – and experience something amazing from Jesus.

So now let's look at the Steward

He **tastes** "the water that had become wine"

He **does not** know

So he **calls** the bridegroom, and then tells him what has happened, and its implications

He too experiences something. It might not make sense to him, but he notes it, tells someone else about it and reaches a conclusion. Whatever has happened, it is better than before. It is 'good wine'.

And the water jars - what do they do?

They stand

And they hold

All a bit passive, as you might expect – though it's still tempting to say they have more action than the disciples

And yet, hang on – in their own way, something profound is happening is happening to them too

- They **held** the old way to God
- The water of purification – part of the Law-given ritual for cleansing, for allowing people to approach God

And they too, in some mysterious way – “do what he tells them to...”

Now they **hold** the new wine, historically a sign of God's blessing because it was the best wine, purer and more substantial than the rest of the yield. Now representing the blessing of a new relationship with God through belief in Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

And the disciples...

To be honest, they don't see much of the action

“Had also been invited” is as far as they get until the last verse

But they “do what he tells them to”

They are present, and observing all that is happening

And from that comes the last verse, which kind of sums up what Jesus told them to do...

“Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory¹ and his disciples believed in him².”

So - Mary, the servants, the steward, the stone jars, the disciples... I wonder which of the participants you most closely identified with as we retold the story?

Maybe you're like Mary – you know Jesus and who he is, and are totally committed to him – with your whole life, wherever that might take you. Even to the agony of the cross....

Maybe you're like the steward – aware that there is something special going on around this Jesus person, but not yet entirely sure what. Yet on the way to finding out more.....

¹ I wonder what those words remind us of? Words we traditionally hear at midnight on Christmas Eve?

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

² Once again we fast forward towards the end of John's gospel, after Jesus' has appeared to Thomas and the other disciples in the upper room. “But these [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

I hesitate to suggest that anyone here is like a stone water jar – but would just point out that without the water jars this story would look very different!

Or maybe you're like the servants – doing as Jesus told them – and seeing something amazing happening as a result....

Or the disciples – on a journey with Jesus, but not yet sure where it might be taking you...

For when we choose to follow Jesus, we experience both the love, mercy, forgiveness and peace of God

AND

The privilege of joining in with his work in the world.

They are two sides of the same coin. Following Jesus is not a spectator sport – it draws us in, calls for the best in us, teaches us how to serve.

“do whatever he tells you”, said Mary

And the same holds true today, whatever our age, stage or capabilities, God has a role for each one of us, both within our personal lives and relationships, *and* within our life together as Church.

And it's an unfortunate truth that some of the basics of church life remain the same whether there are 100+ in the congregation, or less than 20. And that these basics still need to be done. And that it's important that we all play our part – even to do the things that we don't actually fancy doing very much.

Without everyone playing their part – “doing whatever Jesus told them to do” – the water into wine just wouldn't have happened.

Without us all playing our part – “doing whatever Jesus tells us to do” – God's work in the world just will not happen. Be that Messy Church, the Café, caring for the planet or worshipping together on Sunday mornings. All these “water into wine” moments need *us* – just as much as we need God's constant presence and unconditional love in our lives.

“do whatever he tells you”, said Mary

So – to sum up

This story works at all sorts of levels. It's a sign pointing to who Jesus is and the new relationship with God that he offers.

And it's also a reminder, through Mary's instruction to “do whatever he tells you”, that God has roles for each one of us in his great plan for his creation. Some of which we will find appealing – others maybe less so. Yet for his purposes to be fulfilled, we all need to be willing to obey.