

## **Sermon – good things happen when we respond to Jesus (Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January)**

**Readings:** Psalm 128; John 2:1-11

Well it's pretty cruel asking you to sit through readings about wine when I know that a few of you are having a dry January – perhaps that's why we're getting good numbers at Communion?!

Jesus turns water into wine! – perhaps the most famous of the miracles and certainly the one I get asked to perform the most. “Have you learnt that wine trick yet Vicar?!” “Vicar, my glass needs filling, can you do the honours?!” etc. etc. I'm glad to say that David and Sandra haven't approached me yet, so hopefully that means that they have ample supplies for us to toast the happy couple after the service.

To our modern way of thinking, the miracle at Cana can sound a little like a special party trick that Jesus performed to help out some friends. Fill the jars with water, now draw some out and “ta

da!” we have the finest wine. Some of you may have seen Rowan Atkinson's sketch where he is playing a vicar preaching on these same verses from John's gospel:

*And on the third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. And it came to pass that all the wine was drunk. And the mother of Jesus said unto the Lord, "They have no more wine." And Jesus said unto the servants: "Fill six water pots with water." And they did so. And when the steward of the feast did taste from the water of the pots, it had become wine. And they knew not...whence...it had come.*

*But the servants did know, and they applauded loudly in the kitchen. And they said unto the Lord: "How the heck did you do that?" And inquired of him: "Do you do children's parties?"*

Miracles are certainly easier to belittle than to believe. The very nature of them is that they are beyond the ordinary and this makes them unfamiliar and distant, if not impossible to our way of thinking. The Oxford dictionary defines a

miracle as “An extraordinary and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore attributed to a divine agency.”

In an age that values empirical evidence and scientific reason above all else, such a concept can easily be dismissed as “wish fulfilment” or “delusion”. Indeed, the enlightenment philosopher, David Hume, stated that the evidence for the existence of a miracle is always outweighed by the evidence against. As part of his argument, he claimed that the witnesses to a miracle were generally unlikely to be of sufficient quality as to offer substantial support for the event. And he even goes so far as to say that accounts of miracles tend to be popular amongst the “ignorant and barbarous” nations.

Yet it would be a mistake to imagine that those who lived in Biblical times were all instinctively waiting to interpret the world around them in supernatural terms. Indeed, as we heard from the wedding at Cana, the Steward wasn't searching for an extraordinary answer. And as we heard last

week, Nathanael's first instinct, when presented with the idea that Jesus could be the Messiah, was not to instantly believe, but rather, to doubt.

He believes when he actually sees Jesus and hears what he has to say. He assesses the evidence and concludes that there is something special about this man he has been told about. Jesus then tells Nathanael that he will see great things and this miracle at Cana is the first great sign – the first of 7 signs that John records in his gospel to reveal the glory of God in Jesus. “Come and see”, Jesus tells Nathanael and those who follow this instruction invariably see things in a different way, in a different light.

Back at the wedding, Jesus' Mother (whom we know to be Mary - she is not named in John's gospel) instructs the servants to do what Jesus tells them. She knows that good things will happen when following Jesus' instruction and the servants are among the few at the wedding who also come to realise that this is the case. The disciples will come to see this truth this as they continue to

follow Jesus - when they do what Jesus asks, good things happen.

Now this doesn't mean that whenever we seek to walk in the ways of Jesus, we'll get 180 gallons of wine – now that would be a useful tool for evangelism! But rather, if we follow Jesus, we'll find a way to what God intends for each one of us. As we heard in our first reading, the Psalmist also seemed to be very familiar with this truth when he wrote:

“Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. <sup>2</sup> For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.”

When we commit to doing what Jesus asks of us, good things do follow. They might not be part of our plan, but they are part of what God knows is good for us, and I believe they are what will lead to our completion in the fullness of time.

Now, I'm sure that I'm not alone in admitting that there have been many times in my life when I have

not done what Jesus asks – when I have not thought about the consequences of my actions, when I have not put others first, when I have not been thankful, when I have listened first to other voices before God's, when I have doubted the good things that have been shown to me, when I have not loved without limit, when I have resisted God's calling. I could go on! And when I've found myself in these places, I know that something isn't right – I'm not always sure what it is and I'm amazed at how quickly I can forget the lessons I've learnt in the past – but something is clearly missing.

But the great thing is that Jesus doesn't stop asking us to follow Him. And when we do respond once more, we feel ourselves put right – reconnected to the sole source of goodness and purpose, reconnected to God, to Jesus.

Once we do this, it is no guarantee that we won't stray again – as David Kinnaman argues in our thought for the week “*Transformation is a process, a journey, not a one-time decision.*” The life of faith is one of ongoing questioning and moments of

doubt and certainty will certainly fluctuate. Yet, there is evidence that the miracle of God's love for us is real and available to each one of us. We find this in those moments when we do what Jesus asks and encounter that sense of connection – a reality we can find in millions of testimonies from those who have also shared such moments.

Wendell Berry, in our other thought for the week, touches on this reality of God's ongoing calling to us all when he states his belief "...that divine love, incarnate and indwelling in the world, summons the world always towards wholeness, which ultimately is reconciliation and atonement with God." The reconciling, restorative love of God becomes real when we respond to what Jesus asks of us.

When we do what Jesus asks, good things happen.

Amen