2nd Sunday in OT 2025

The story of The Wedding Feast at Cana will remind many couples their own wedding day. It conveys the joys, and stresses, often associated with the organisation of a wedding. However, it may come as a surprise to many that the story is not actually about marriage! St John, the author of the Gospel, in relating his experience of that particular wedding, perceived a deeper meaning in the event. The challenge for us is to grasp that which John really wants us to understand. Although he was a guest at Cana, as a skilled wordsmith, he peppered his account of the wedding feast with clues that take us far from Cana, and propel us forward three years, bringing us to Jerusalem. He is also setting before us the question, “What does Jesus mean for you?” It is possible to give a factual answer to that question, since those facts are easily found in the Gospels, but our answer must be inspired by faith; each of us must answer with our mind, with our heart, and with our soul, what Jesus means for us.

John says of Jesus*, “The Word became flesh, he lived among us” (Jn.1:14).* That event we have recently celebrated at Christmas – in Jesus, God came down to earth and lived among us. John now relates the story of the wedding at Cana in order, not only to show the extraordinary significance of that event, but also to spell out the personal implications it has for each one of us. He is leading us to encounter Jesus, the one who is at the very core of our faith, and to consider the consequences of that encounter.

An often overlooked aspect of this Gospel passage is one which touches on the very nature of Christian faith. True to the culture of the day, the wedding feast of Cana would have lasted a week! It was an occasion for festivity and rejoicing, not only for the two families directly concerned, but for the whole village, and friends too from neighbouring villages – the Gospel passage indicates that saying, *“the mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited.”* In all cultures, weddings are wonderfully joyful occasions! Guests dress up, they sing, dance, joke, laugh, share food and wine, and have fun together. At that wedding in Cana, Jesus would have been part of that festivity, celebrating, singing and dancing, and profoundly happy to do so with people whom he knew and loved. Jesus brings joy and celebrates love! Religion in our society is frequently presented as a cramping of personal liberty, and of putting a damper on fun; others, sadly, experience faith as a tortuous burden, which weighs them down with scruples – but true faith is always a joy!

St John, in the last sentence of the Gospel passage, indicates what the story of the wedding feast is all about, *“He let his glory be seen, and his disciples believed in him”*. But we will only appreciate the full meaning of this sentence, if we regard the story of the wedding at Cana as an invitation to take part in a kind of treasure hunt, following the careful, cryptic clues with which John has peppered the account.

The first clue is the presence of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She draws Jesus’ attention to the fact that, *“They have no wine”.* It is a profound mistake to think of Mary’s role as that of merely one of maternal persuasion. Such gentle arm twisting is not in St John’s thinking! He mentions Mary for two reasons: first, the real transformation is not water into wine, but rather the personal transformation that takes place when we follow Mary’s sound advice, and *“Do whatever he tells you”*; the second reason, is that John is preparing us for our next, and even more remarkable, meeting with Mary – that will be beneath the Cross.

Mention of the Cross brings into focus Jesus’ puzzling response to his mother, *“My hour has not come yet”.* The event of the wedding feast propels our minds forward to the Last Supper, the passion and death of Jesus on Good Friday, and the resurrection on Easter Sunday – this is the *“hour”* when his glory will be fully revealed – glory that is his self-giving love.

Self-giving love is at the very heart of a marriage – but Jesus on the Cross gives self-giving love a whole new understanding. This is what St John indicates in his reference to the *“stone water jars”* filled *“to the brim”* with *“the best wine”* – wine is the symbol of the self-giving of the grapes, and thus a symbol of love! So, although the Gospel passage is not about a marriage, in the end it is, in fact, about a particular marriage. Jesus is the bridegroom, and the Christian community is his spouse! We are to drink in his self-giving love, and to share it with each other, *“loving one another as he has loved us” (cf John 13:34).* When, as Mary reminds us, we *“Do whatever he tells (us)”,* transformation happens!

*“Lord Jesus,*

*by our joy in your love*

*may we show your glory*

*to the world.”* **Amen.**