**24th JAN 2021 IP**

**THE WEDDING**

**JOHN 2: 1 - 11**

The other day I dipped into one of Gordon Ramsay’s TV ‘kitchen nightmares’, which, as they invariably do, turned out to be like a marriage made in heaven, with the husband and wife owners rediscovering their love for each other whilst the restaurant was transformed. However, at the end Gordon and the owners did a shocking thing, they shook hands!! I thought to myself, you can’t do that, it is not allowed. I will have to write to the BBC. Can you remember those days of physical closeness? When you could stand or sit next to someone and talk to them and if you met them the next day you would recognise them, because there were no masks?! Those days when there would be laughter and perhaps too, yes, singing!

I know it is hard to remember, but if you can recall such a celebration it will help as we think of this special occasion, the wedding in Cana. Weddings are a celebration and symbol of the gift of love and friendship down the millenia and are accompanied often by the presence of new life, as a newborn joins the family and in more recent years the arrival of new life may already have happened as things have gotten a little out of kilter. In the life and times of Jesus I don’t think they did ten story wedding cakes or church bells, but one thing they could not do without was wine. The alcohol content of their wine would, on a scale, be closer to fanta than table wine, so you could drink plenty of it. However, it was not only vital as a source of hydration, it was also a source and symbol of joy and so for it to run out, as it did in Cana, would suggest that the couple could not really be called happy, but rather joyless; a disgrace that would linger long in their marriage. I guess the modern equivalent would be running out of food, which I seem to remember happened at a wedding I attended with Mary who for show was wearing a lovely white dress. Thankfully more food eventually arrived and we had great joy then and now, but we can still remember when the food ran out….

So when Mary said to Jesus that ***‘they have no more wine’*** this was not the moment for anyone to say, well it could be worse. Actually it was about to get worse, because Jesus didn’t seem to want to take any responsibility for the situation and why should He, after all He was just a guest. Mary was hoping Jesus would help this now nearly joyless couple and in some way change this tailspinning disaster, but instead Jesus said why are you involving Me? However, there are two clues that would have given Mary hope. The first was Jesus said, ‘woman’, which sounds a little rude to us, but can better be translated as lady. Jesus was never attached to His Mum’s apron strings, but by using this word ‘woman’ or ‘lady’ He was signing towards a change of season. I’m sure Mary would have remained His dearly beloved Mum, but the path of His life had taken a dramatic change. Not only is Jesus now leaving home, but He is embarking upon His life’s work. The second clue was He said ***‘My hour has not yet come’***, which could mean that His hour was around the corner, but Mary was in no mood to be kept waiting as she said ***‘do whatever He tells you’!*** Perhaps she thought that even if Jesus was waiting for another wedding He would at least rescue this one from disaster.

Then the miracle flows as approximately 720 litres of water is converted into the equivalent of 720 bottles of the best of wines. It is a miracle that overflows in both abundance and quality, so much so that the ‘master of the banquet’ was no longer panicking, but was able to say to the bridegroom this wedding is truly amazing. Anyway back to those strange words of Jesus ‘My hour has not yet come’! Was He thinking of another wedding?! Could it have been true that He realised that if He was to bless this wedding in Cana He was also embarking on the preparation of a cosmic wedding and the time for this was not quite yet?

Jesus came on earth to affirm the world and His Creation. After all, at the beginning of our world before He was born on earth, we are told that He ***‘was filled with delight day after day rejoicing always in His presence, rejoicing in His whole world and delighting in the human race’*** (Proverbs 8: 30 - 31). Nothing surpasses the visible demonstration of love in our community than the celebration of the loving commitment between a man and a woman as is seen and symbolised at a wedding. Marriage is a cornerstone and key building block of human society. Not that it means we all have to be married and none of us will be married all our lives anyway. Singleness is a unique gift too and often in God’s Kingdom singleness can be more fruitful and, after all, if you are single then no one grabs all the duvez and leaves you with hypothermia, your time is your own and you can talk to yourself without anyone noticing. But without weddings and without families life simply would not go on. So this is a key part of our lives that Jesus wanted to bless by producing a river of wine, a river of love and joy at Cana and in so doing He was saying to us all that He longs to bless our lives together whether in marriage between a man and a woman or in all our natural friendships and relationships. And this wasn’t the only occasion that Jesus gave His stamp of approval…. Think of all those meals He shared with the disciples and others from all walks of life and the miraculous provision this time not of wine, but of bread in the feeding of the 5000 and 4000! However, what is special about this wedding and its overflowing wine of love and joy was that it ***‘was the FIRST of the signs through which He revealed His glory’*** (John 2: 11). The FIRST of signs that said this was not just a man, but also was the living God.

So when Jesus said His hour had not yet come was it because He was thinking of another wedding? And is the turning of the water into the wine in this important wedding in Cana pointing to this other wedding. Was the hour that had not yet quite come ***‘the wedding of the Lamb’*** (Revelation 19:7) where just as husbands love their wives so Christ loves the church?! (Ephesians 5: 25). And in the blessing of this wedding in Cana with the abundance of the best of wines and the overflow of love and joy, was Jesus saying that the hour was almost here when He would release the love of His and the Father’s presence through the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? In John 12: 23 we read that the hour had indeed come, the hour ***‘for the Son of Man to be glorified’*** as Jesus was speaking of His imminent death on the cross.

The wine and joy of the Kingdom was released that day at the wedding in Cana, but only as Jesus drank down the wine of death on the cross could the wine of His love and joy be released to us. Have you drunk of the wine of His love and joy?! Through the cross it is available to you, but you must throw your old wine and your old way of doing things away, yes don’t make anything more important than your relationship with your loving Father in heaven and ask God’s forgiveness for anything you know for yourself or before God is wrong and then ask Jesus, with the new wine of His Spirit, to come into your heart, AND HE WILL!

What does this all mean for us? I have four recommendations for you.

1. Don’t slowly be tricked into thinking that the lovelessness of Covid is what God wants for us. Hold on to those thoughts of family and community celebrations even of weddings.
2. Remember that weddings are a key symbol of love in our human race, but that doesn’t mean that brotherly and sisterly love and indeed the highest of loves, sacrificial love, aren’t vital to the thriving of society and humanity.
3. If you like weddings then don’t stop at the romance of a wedding between a man and a woman, but find your way in your imagination and heart to the romance of the wedding between Jesus and His Church. Between His love for you and your love for Him.
4. Finally, we must continue to pray and scheme how to let the abundant wine of God’s love and joy at Cana and at Pentecost overflow into our streets and community.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Why was the running out of wine a crisis at the wedding in Cana in Galilee?
2. What did the wine symbolise?
3. Why do you think Jesus said ‘My hour has not yet come?’
4. What does the wine in the wedding at Cana symbolise for us in our 21st century? And how is it available to us?