

St Brandon's, Sermon for 24th January 2021.

Genesis 14:17–20, Psalm 128, John 2:1–11

Water into Wine

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Today's gospel is one of the best known bible stories. We frequently hear quips about turning water into wine; along with walking on the water, it must rate as one of Jesus's best known miracles, capturing something we can all picture but hardly believe - and would love to have at our fingertips!

Having told the story, the author, John, says '*Jesus did this, the first of his signs.*'

Signs point us to things so we can locate them or identify them: we have labels on jars, and signposts on crossroads. Signs can also be like symbols: means of unlocking meaning; small but potent images that hold the power of revealing much bigger truths. And this story is full of signs and symbols, and they point us forwards, pointing from the old to the new; the was, is and is to come.

There are signs and symbols in this passage that point us from this starting point of Jesus's ministry to his crucifixion and beyond. It is '*On the third day*' that he performs this miracle; it is the third day that he has been gathering his disciples, but it puts us in mind, of course, of the three days of waiting for the resurrection. Jesus tells his mother that his hour has not yet come; those who follow John's gospel through Holy Week hear on the Tuesday of Holy Week from John chapter 12, Jesus telling the Greeks "*the hour has come ...*"

So perhaps its no coincidence that the six stone water-jars that Jesus orders to be filled with water are specified as being water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification. Perhaps it is pointing to Jesus as the one who will transform our means of salvation, the one who will bring in a new order, a new covenant that will supersede the need for purification rites for those who come to believe in him. Who will at the last supper, tell his disciples sharing the cup of wine he pours, that it is his blood of the covenant which is poured out for many; that the cup we share at the Eucharist is no less than his blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins? Pointing to Jesus as the one who will transform the whole approach to God; *Jesus in doing this, revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.* They did not see and understand the significance of the miracle, but they saw something of his glory, and they believed.

The whole notion of the promise of the New emerging, is wonderfully illustrated by a wedding: a new union, full of joy, anticipation, and love. That is the setting

for Jesus's first revealing of who he is, what lies ahead and what that means for us.

Jesus changed water into wine.

He took the ordinary and made it extraordinary.

He turned what was a pending problem into a blessing.

The wedding feast became a huge success with an abundance of the very best wine, kept for this moment of embarrassment and shame: *"They have no wine."*

Then everything was transformed.

I imagine a lot of drinking, a lot of rejoicing and merriment, a lot of cheering off the couple to their first night ... a lot of hangovers!

Eventually the party would have ended, and ordinary life taken up again. It says in the next verse

'After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there for a few days.'

But things will not have gone quite back to where they were. These new disciples have discovered something life-changing about Jesus they are never going to forget. Mary has stepped a bit further back from being the parental authority: she finds Jesus in that episode, speaking with his own authority and rebuking her: *"Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."* She relinquishes something when she says, *"Do whatever he tells you"*.

How do Mary and his brothers regard Jesus now?

What do they make of him?

Has the relationship between them and Jesus shifted to admit the disciples as the new family?

Are they ready for this transformation of their brother, their relationship, and where God might be in it?

Everything ordinary has to be got on with but they'll not go back to where they were.

This is how God works in us.

When we are touched by him through words, actions, sight or silence; when the grace of a moment's presence touches us it offers a tiny transformation of who we are. And although the moment passes, and the effervescence ceases, we do not go back to being quite who we were.

We build ourselves up imperceptibly, day by day by the means of his transforming grace.

We, who are born from the waters of the womb, we who are largely composed of water, become transformed little by little ourselves; water into wine.

It happens so that we can become more than brim full – can overflow that wine for others: be sufficiently transformed that we ourselves transform others with that blessing.

Psalms 128 tells us, 'Happy is everyone who fears the Lord', and goes on to describe the blessings that God will bestow ... should we be so fortunate: if we took this too literally we would end up with most of us feeling excluded from his blessing. But not so.

'Happy' is not the same as 'immune from misfortune and hardship'. 'Happy' is a quality that stands aside from context because of God's transformative powers.

Transformation by definition is an acknowledgement that all is not perfect in our lives. Not perfect in a fairy tale 'happy-ever-after' way externally, as much as not perfect in a perfectly pure and holy way internally/spiritually. At least, not in our messy, earthly lives.

We are not guaranteed wealth, or lasting marriage, or children – yet happiness can prevail in fearing the Lord (that is, putting the Lord first), and in doing so, be a productive and fulfilled life. We are not guaranteed anything in this life, there is no certainty in the physical but there is certainty in the constancy of God who blesses us, transforms us and loves us into being new people.

In the OT reading, the priest, King Melchizedek of Salem sets bread and wine before Abram in celebration, then calls on God most High to bless Abram.

At a wedding feast in Cana, Jesus blesses those gathered by turning water into wine.

At a supper table in Jerusalem, Jesus blesses us throughout all ages by turning his death into our life; his body and blood into our bread and wine.

We are transformed through prayer, the sacrament, and grace working through relationships and the ordinary stuff of life. The transformative gift of faith changes our ability to be strong in adversity, to trust, to receive the blessing of happiness despite circumstance.

Let us be open therefore, to being transformed and transformative.

Amen