

What goes around, comes around, and nothing seems to come round in the church Bible reading rota quite as much as the Wedding at Cana. In this parish, which has more than a usual share of nuptial knot tying, every Saturday from spring to summer it seems is guaranteed to contain a surprisingly radiant bride, a bolshie photographer, a badly sung rendition of give me joy in my heart and at least one mention of the Wedding at Cana. And today it's back again, star of the show in the eucharist.

So when I sat down earlier in the week to work out what I was going to say to you this morning cycling round and round my head flapping like a carrier bag stuck in a tree in a hurricane were these basic questions. What can be said about that ancient knees-up that hasn't been said before? And when nothing immediately pinged into view in answer I moved on to. What can be said about weddings that hasn't been said before? And then in utter desperation, What can I say about weddings that I haven't said before? Alas, I discovered that I don't have much more to say about weddings until I learn to swear in a fifth language, so it was, calm down, stop panicking, go back up the list to the starting proposition: What can I say about the Wedding at Cana that I haven't said before? I know you're quite insistent on novelty every Sunday so it was important to get this right.

This is now my fourth year in the role of Rector of the Chocolate Box Wedding Parish, so Cana's been on the menu quite a few times already, so let's recap on what I've managed to scrape together in previous years and see what's left at the end. You see I know you were listening, you remembered all of it and so I can't just do a straight repeat. I'm becoming more inventive with my recycling now. It's a recap then. Not quite the greatest hits, more the Rector's Retrospective.

So, the wedding at Cana, water into wine. We've explored how it wasn't just showing off; nor does the story necessarily represent a stamp of approval for marriage, per se: a wedding is the only place you'd need lots of wine back then: no point changing water into wine at a jumble sale or the sheep shearing. Nor of course was it an endorsement of binge drinking.

If that's what not to get from this story, what we have thought we can take away is God's outrageous abundance, the abundance of his gifts and pouring out of his grace- cos not only was it good wine, there was *loads* of it. We noticed that Jesus has come that we may have life and life in abundance. Also, that the miracle at Cana signals that change is coming the best is yet to come and you ain't seen nothing yet. In some more catholic moments

we've explored the sacramental meaning of what happened there and also noticed that this is the first time we've seen Mary intercede on behalf of others, something Christian tradition maintains she's gone on to do a lot of. We've even turned water into wine ourselves at that Parade service when the Brownies forgot to turn up. What a life skill they've missed learning and what a fundraising opportunity we would have if only people would want to buy wine that tasted exactly like water flavoured with food colouring. I am thinking of something similar as an encouragement for Brides not to be late to their weddings: be on the dot or all the reception wine turns to water. Much more effective than a £100 fine.

There we go. Three years of the Wedding at Cana in two minutes. By my reckoning, what's left to talk about is two things either 1) Jesus' rather astonishing attitude to his mother- you think it sounds rude in English, wait till you hear it in Aramaic or ,2, erm, the bathwater.

So, I've gone for the less offensive option, which is the bathwater. That's what was in those six stone jars. Water for bathing. Maybe the wine doesn't seem quite so appealing now eh? Even given its ritualistic ring, it's still water at its most humble, there to wash away the accumulated dirt of the day. And it's crucial in this miracle that Jesus chose to turn the bathwater into wine. It's not just because it was handy. Nothing in a gospel miracle story is ever there by accident. It's the bathwater, because the miracle at Cana is all about God's transformation of the things that nobody really ever thinks about, that nobody ever really notices until they have to and when they do they move on quickly, because these things are really not that important. It's those things that God has chosen to transform into the best. And Cana is just the start. Jesus's ministry from beginning to end and beyond is about the transformation of the people that nobody every really wants to think about, that nobody ever really notices until they have to and when they do they move on quickly, because these people are really not that important and we'd rather not notice.

The rough sleeper in the bus shelter at Windsor. The benefit claimant struggling to get by for a week on the same money we'd use to fill up the car's petrol tank. The gay man at risk of his life in Chechnya. The migrant on an inflatable dinghy sinking in the Mediterranean. The trafficked sex-worker in the flat above the shop. The woman with dementia lost on the street, the traveller that's recently arrived in your neighbourhood, the kid with profound special needs.

In short, human bathwater. The stuff everybody else has chosen to dump their dirt in. The broken people at the bottom of the pile. People who have nowhere else to turn to, nothing like family and wealth, success and status to distract them from God. The marginalised, the persecuted, the rejected, the outcast. These are the people who are beloved of God. They are the beloved of God because they look like Jesus on the road to Calvary.

These are they for whom this miracle at Cana promises transformation. The least to the greatest. The lowly raised up. The water that is the best wine.

God loves you, this you know, and he particularly loves you if you're human bathwater.

It has long been an overworked aphorism that the Church of England is the Conservative party at prayer. Obviously in party political terms this is nonsense (unless you've been lying to me all these years) but rattling away inside that hollow cliché is the kernel of a truth which attests to the perspective that sees our faith as one that embodies respectability, convention, conformity and power. The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate. Putting on your Sunday best, behaving your self, knowing your place. A caricature perhaps but one that, I suppose, would not be entirely untrue as a description of one stream of Anglican Christianity.

But such Christianity— that is contented, untroubled and untroubling— is not the Christianity of Cana and it is not the Christianity of the Cross. It is Christianity tamed, muzzled, neutered and— for added humiliation— with one of those plastic bucket things on your head to stop you licking the wound. Christianity is not contented, untroubled and untroubling: it is the faith of the marginalised, the persecuted, the rejected and the outcast.

'The poor are always with you' Jesus said. He was right of course, and that's because each generation makes poverty anew, we don't have to, but we do. We give it a different expression, give poverty a different face. It's not only about money: poverty in the end is about disempowerment and wherever some of us take it as our right to lord it over others we perpetuate the poverty of our brothers and sisters, we wash our impurities in them as though they were bathwater.

There is often an expectation that a sermon will end with an exhortation to action, something you can take home to do to put practical flesh on the bones of the gospel message. Alas, it's rarely as simple as 3 2 1 Kingdom!

There's no quick fix for salvation, no instant way to turn bathwater into wine. So we can't go away today with a miracle solution: but nor are we stuck with fine words and fighting talk. We can encourage in ourselves a particular perspective, a bathwater-soaked way of seeing the world. *Then* when at some future point we are presented with an occasion when we might just make a difference, then we won't have to spend too long thinking it through but will go the gospel way as if it's second nature.

Like the water turned into wine, everything is transformed by the incarnation. And that transformation starts here and now, with us. We probably won't notice the change when it's happening. But stick with it, keep the faith, never get complacent, and when the time for the taste test comes, it just might be that water will have turned into the very best wine.