

SERMON - John 2 vs 1-11 – Celebrate

St Swithin's Church

I'm really looking forward to taking weddings – The preparation, anticipation, beauty, the buzz and of course wondering if the best man has remembered the rings or not! It's something I know I'll enjoy.

John gives us an account in today's passage of wonderful celebration of a wedding feast. Jesus and his disciples have been invited to a party that would have lasted up to a week. A huge, elaborate event, replacing even a honeymoon.

It is at this event that Jesus does his first miracle, making this wedding far more about the guest than about the bride and groom. In fact if you look at verse 11, John describes it as a sign – the first of 7 signs that point to who Jesus is and “through which he reveals his glory”.

These 7 signs are unique to John's Gospel and he refers to them in chapter 20 vs 31 saying “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in His name.

These signs are purposeful and spiritually significant because each one helps the reader to know Jesus and receive the life that He offers. Like a parable they have meanings beyond what actually happens - they are public clues to help people to see who Jesus is and why He had come.

It might seem strange that Jesus' first miracle was this one rather than a healing, or giving sight to the blind or forgiving sin. But, not only does it tell us that Jesus enjoys a celebration, but also that Jesus always has good reasons for what he does.

We're going to spend a few minutes together today considering this first sign and thinking about Jesus as

1. The Master of The Banquet who brings Joy
2. The Messiah who brings Salvation

The Master of the Banquet. Who is this man that steals the show at a wedding and rescues a young couple from disaster and shame?

He is merely a guest...and yet this miracle sets the scene at the beginning of his ministry for all that is to follow.

A successful 'wedding breakfast' to give it its official title can make or break a party depending on how efficient and organised the 'Master of ceremonies' is. Some are so nervous they don't have a clue what's happening, whilst others give clear direction throughout a meal, ensure drinks are topped up, food arrives on time and speeches happen at the appropriate moment.

The Master of the Banquet here has a similar role. He is a guest and part of his role would have been to keep an eye on the drinks, ensuring there was plenty of wine for the guests. Wine was the standard drink then – no bar! The best wine would have been served first, and then when that had run out the cheap stuff would come out as the hosts would imagine their guests would be less discerning later on!

And yet, its day three of what could have been a week long celebration and the wine has run out – all the wine...the chateau Neuf du Pap and the Lambrusco! It's all gone - an utter disaster. Mary notices immediately, perhaps because she was involved in the catering. She tells her son, hinting that He could do something about the situation.

Soon after, the Master of the banquet is tasting the best wine he has ever had and quickly imagines the bridegroom has saved the very best till now. Disaster is avoided and celebrations continue as Jesus enables the party to keep going even better than before

You see, Jesus is the true Master of The Banquet. He is the one that brings real joy to the party. The message here is that He has come to bring joy to all, to give a reason to celebrate that cannot be matched by any earthly celebration.

He is the everlasting and abundant joy giver!

In the world's terms, Joy is a limited experience. Parties are short lived, the highs of life ebb and flow. The prodigal spends his inheritance, the teenager plays hard until they are exhausted and realise their life style doesn't quite provide what they are hoping for. The professional works hard, enjoys their holidays and yet still feels unfulfilled at the end of their working life.

Caroline Flack, a TV Presenter took her own life recently. She was fun, beautiful, bubbly. She was at the top of her game – she'd won Strictly Come Dancing, and had brought the TV programme Love Island to the top of the TV 'charts'. And yet, she was in pain, broken, and sad – had been arrested for assault, and for whatever reason couldn't go on anymore! She looked joyful when we saw her on tele and yet that joy was only skin deep!

Joy is limited other than through Christ. Yes, we face ups and downs, suffering and pain, sorrows and difficulty but this Master of The Banquet invites us to an everlasting feast with Him where joy is boundless, and celebrations will be beyond our wildest imaginations

The questions for us today is, do we know this Jesus, the Joy bringer? Do we celebrate and delight in the one who is Lord of the Feast? Are we delighting in the abundance life he provides. Or are we trudging on....keeping going, working hard...complaining a bit along the way and perhaps feeling resentful of how hard it is to be a Christian or how tough life is – I'm not saying life isn't tough but let's remember that the Christian life is one of joy because we know where we are heading, and we know whose party we have been invited to for eternity.

Secondly, Jesus is the Messiah, who offers Salvation to all

Jesus directs the servants to fill the 6 ceremonial water jars to the brim. These jars were important =- the guests would have needed to wash their hands regularly during their week long celebrations to keep themselves ceremonially pure before God. Washing hands, along with sacrifices and offerings were fundamental to the life of an obedient Jewish family. Jesus' request is deliberate. Turning the water jars into the best wine has divine purpose.

You see, the Jewish regulations of the Old Testament demonstrated God's holiness and that human beings were spiritually flawed and in need of spiritual cleansing through the rituals God gave Israel. Without these regulations and rituals people could not enjoy the presence of God with them.

Jesus here, replaces this old idea, by signposting a new way! A new life that he offers where those regulations and rules are no longer necessary and where anyone can enjoy a full and joyful life with him for all eternity simply by accepting the abundant gift he gives of himself at the cross.

We try to purify ourselves for God still by all sorts of means – by trying to improve our behaviour or making sure we keep to the ritual of church, or prayer or ‘doing good’. But none of this is enough – Jesus has come to replace the old system of Jewish law by offering life in all its fullness and abundance through believing and trusting Him.

This best wine is His salvation – offered to all people. It is abundant, overflowing and there is enough for all. This wine brings everlasting joy as we are invited “Taste and See that the Lord is God”. Come and taste it, enjoy it, see that it is good and celebrate!

The best has been saved until now because Jesus is the Messiah, the best gift that God can offer people – they’ve had rituals, regulations, people to lead them and prophets to guide them. But all have been flawed. Jesus is without flaw, the greatest gift of all.

He knows the suffering that is to come but he has 3 years to demonstrate to those he meets who he is, and to reveal the glory of God – This wonderful sign is only the first reveal of the abundant joyful life he offers. There’s so much more to come....

I wonder how you demonstrate the joy of knowing Christ. We are not all people who jump up and down singing at the tops of our voices how great Jesus is. We are not all those who can sit in peace in a garden and know the joy of Christ as we enjoy his creation.

Some of us have suffered greatly, or are suffering greatly. Some of us struggle with depression and anxiety. Some of us are sick, bereaved, lonely or afraid.

But, and it’s an important BUT – Amidst this reality, Jesus is the joy bringer. Despite his suffering, Paul rejoiced at the work of Christ so much that he longed to be with Him before all else. Receiving Christ into our lives brings Joy into the deepest parts of our hearts as we experience His love, and become confident of the party that we’ve been invited to and will enjoy for all eternity.

It starts the day we give our lives to Him - Joy is there to draw on through all we face from day to day. Enjoy Him, celebrate Him, raise your voices in praise to Him, and sit in the quiet with him. He offers you life and life in all its fullness – Receive that from Him.

Pray

Father God, as we come before you now may each of us receive afresh the Joy that you offer in Christ. May we know life in all its fullness as we follow you this week and may we celebrate!