

Circuit Service 16th January 2022 prepared by Mrs June Hardcastle

Call to Worship

This is the Lord's Day and we will praise Him.

So, come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise.

Hymn StheF 51 Great is Thy Faithfulness <https://youtu.be/dTKIqmdfHSk>

1 "Great is Thy faithfulness," O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

"Great is Thy faithfulness!" "Great is Thy faithfulness!"
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
"Great is Thy faithfulness," Lord, unto me!

2 Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

3 Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Prayer

Lord God, you are a strong rock in whom we trust
All our confidence rests in You.

Deep in our mother's wombs, you knew us
Before our limbs were formed, you yearned for us
When we were still unseen, you cherished the thought of us.

When we are silent, you understand our thoughts,
When we shout and rage, you hear our plea and our uncertainty,
When we stammer, you form the words in our mouths.

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants do give you most humble and hearty thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we ask you, give us that due sense of all your mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful; and that we show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days. And this also, that in this holy fellowship to approach each other not as strangers but as pilgrims and travellers together in mission and service to the world. Amen

Hymn StheF 161 Speak O Lord as we come to you https://youtu.be/my90e3a_nlM

Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of Your Holy Word.
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All Your purposes for Your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
Holy reverence, true humility;
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity.
Cause our faith to rise; cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority.
Words of pow'r that can never fail—
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us—
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on Your promises,
And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till Your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory.

Bible Readings

Isaiah 62 verses 1-5 John 2 verses 1-11

Sermon

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rYqqIMgAGCyc70l1lnYBnAb_wKzs9_a7/view?usp=sharing

I knew Nigel's mother for 47 years before she died. In all that time, I never heard her give a brief outline of a story. For example, what could have been said as

“I was in the town and bumped into Daphne. We had a bit of a chat and came back together on the bus.”

Would have been something like this:

“I caught the 33 bus from the end of the road this morning. The bus was five minutes late and crowded but someone got up and gave me a seat. It took much longer than usual because of all the roadworks on Tilehurst Rd. You would be amazed at how dreadful the pavements are in Friar Street. I am going to write a letter to the council. Someone will have an accident along there unless something is done. I went into WH Smith and ...and.. and.”

I am sure you get the picture!

The Lectionary Gospel story for today is rather like that. What could have been recorded as

“Jesus went to a wedding. The wine ran out. He performed a miracle so there was plenty of wine and everyone said it was the best wine of the celebration.”

But what we do have is the story told in 233 words over 11 verses. And there are many sermons to be preached from that, many themes which could carry us into different directions.

- At the outset we are given a time frame: on the Third Day. To those of us 'in the know' about the whole story of Jesus, there is more than an echo forward in time to the Resurrection. Much to be said about how this story, the wedding at Cana, links with On the Third Day He rose again.
- Or there is the place name Cana. It has a meaning of the **intertwining of many strands** and within that meaning two uses: the first is reeds and twigs which a bird uses to make its nest and the second is acts of trade which combine together to make a flourishing economy. An interesting possible reflection there on how this, as John puts it the first of the Signs of who Jesus is, how this miracle reassures us that he prepares a home for us as the nesting birds prepares for its chicks and how this miracle assures us that what He does will lead to abundance.
- Or what about this view it gives us of Mary? Mary not much referred to in our Methodist Way of Life and Worship, or in mainstream Church of England, except at Christmas, and our vision of her character often limited by her image on Christmas cards: eye down, head covered... Yet here in this story she counters Jesus's not wanting to be involved with her taking control and summoning the servants. This is a woman not afraid to speak up, a woman not afraid to take the lead, a woman who is confident. Much to be explored there!
- Or what about those stone pots which were for the Rites of Purification? I could tell you more about those than you would probably want to know!
- Or there is also the significance of there being SIX water pots. MUCH to say about that but just to summarise:

After 6 days, God rested and saw that everything was good. After 6 days, completion Moses and Joshua went up to Mount Sinai where the glory of the Lord rested on them for six days AFTER 6 DAYS God called Moses to enter the cloud's midst for forty days and nights. There after 6 days he saw the glory of God on the top of the mountain. The sixth chapter of Joshua is where we read that Joshua and the Israelites marched around Jericho once a day for six days AFTER SIX DAYS that the people were to march around Jericho with the priests blowing the trumpets so the city walls would fall.

In the Mark recording of the Transfiguration of Jesus (Mark9) the story starts with: after 6 days: we are immediately alerted to expect a close encounter of the God kind.

So the number 6. we know that a close encounter with God and seeing him at work is about to happen.

AND other reflections: those of you who are preachers, worship leaders, Bible study enthusiasts, will be able to spot those, but I think those are sufficient to show how much there is in this story.

The question now is: what message do I bring you today from this story at the wedding in Cana of Galilee?

Let us focus on this. **How was this miracle performed?** Jesus told the servants to fill the 6 stone pots with water. And it was the water that was changed into wine.

WHY WHY WHY? Why get the servants to go to the bother of filling up those pots when surely Jesus could just by a click of his fingers have had them filled with wine.

Jesus uses the most common element of our human life WATER. The most needful but surely the least exciting, the most ordinary.

As He is able to change water into the very best wine of the feast, He is able to so work within us, us for whom He stretched out his arms on blood soaked planks of woods, that we become the very embodiment of the prophecy of Isaiah we heard in the Old Testament reading:

You will be a crown of splendour in the Lord's hands, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

It is as it is written in 2 Corinthians 4

⁷ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. ⁸ We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed

¹⁵ For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

Just as that water in earthen vessels became the finest wine of the feast, so the treasure which is us in these human vessels, will be a splendour by the hand of the Lord.

One of the enduring hymns of our faith, Love Divine, all loves excelling, has the magnificent last verse

**Finish, then, Thy new creation
Pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee.
Changed from glory into glory
Til in heaven we take our place,
Til we cast our crowns before Thee
Lost in wonder, love and praise.**

Have faith that the Lord who water into wine, is changing us so that day by day we are more and more the embodiment of who He has destined us to be.

Don't look on your imperfections, on your slowness to learn from Him and sometimes reluctance to follow.

Look only Him who is able and who never turns anyone who comes to Him.

Prayer

Lord our God, your mercy and forgiveness stretches out to us and includes all who come to you in repentance. We long to be all the treasure of holiness and righteousness that is your will for us. Forgive us where we have failed in thought, word or deed. Renew us with your miracle of gracious forgiveness. We rejoice that you never turn us away. Amen

Hymn Stthef 331 King of Kings, Majesty <https://youtu.be/ZKAQvIEotc8>

King Of Kings, Majesty,
God Of Heaven Living In Me,
Gentle Saviour, Closest Friend,
Strong Deliverer, Beginning And End,
All Within Me Falls At Your Throne.
Your Majesty, I Can but Bow,
I Lay My All Before You Now.
In Royal Robes I Don't Deserve
I Live To Serve Your Majesty.

Earth And Heaven Worship You,
Love Eternal, Faithful And True,
Who Bought The Nations, Ransomed Souls,
Brought This Sinner Near To Your Throne;
All Within Me Cries Out In Praise.

Your Majesty, I Can but Bow,
I Lay My All Before You Now.
In Royal Robes I Don't Deserve
I Live To Serve Your Majesty.

Prayers

Lord, we long to see the bringing in of your Kingdom in its fullness.

We pray for the help of your Holy Spirit to lead and guide where there is war and terrorism destroying lives and creating fear.

And where there is violence in our streets and in our homes.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Lord, we pray for the help of your Holy Spirit to lead and guide where people are hungry and thirsty, where disasters and disease are taking lives.

And where our foolishness is destroying our planet.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for the help of your Holy Spirit to lead and guide where refugees and asylum seekers look for safety.

And where the homeless seek a home.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

In a few moments of quiet, we hold before the Lord those known to us who are in trouble, sorrow, need or sickness. And those who grieve the death of a loved one.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We gather all our prayers in the words that Jesus taught us... Our Father who art in heaven...

Hymn StheF 503 Love Divine <https://youtu.be/sw5ZCZeS32M>

1. Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of Heav'n to earth come down;
Fix in us thy humble dwelling;
All thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
Pure unbounded love Thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.

2. Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit
Into every troubled breast!
Let us all in Thee inherit;
Let us find that second rest.
Take away our bent to sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.

3. Come, Almighty to deliver,
Let us all Thy life receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Never more Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray and praise Thee without ceasing,
Glory in Thy perfect love.

4. Finish, then, Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in Heav'n we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Final prayer

May Almighty God whose Son revealed In signs and in miracles the wonder of His saving presence, renew you day by day with His heavenly grace and sustain you in all the tomorrows to come.
The Grace pf our Lord Jesus, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore.
Amen