

The Marriage at Cana - 24th January 2021

When I arrived at Christ Church in 2016 there were, as I remember, two wine coolers each holding 45 bottles designed to keep white wine at the correct temperature. I tried to imagine what sort of liturgical celebrations required that quantity of wine – it felt like my sort of church! In time I realised that the wine was served at book signings in Christ Church organised by the local independent bookshop.

The provision of wine at the marriage of Cana was even more lavish – I reckon the volume of water turned into wine is around 960 pints – enough for a couple more days of celebration even if there were 200 or so people.

It's a curious story and only turns up in John's gospel. It sounds like something Mary remembered and told John. In particular, she remembered the brusque brush off, "What is that to do with you and me?" And perhaps it stuck in her mind because of the contrast between what he said – "My time has not yet come" – and what he then did. Later in his ministry he would tell a story of two sons asked by their father to go and work in the family vineyard. The first said, "Yes of course," but then never turned up in the vineyard. The second said he couldn't go – he was busy – but later he found some time and did go and work in the vineyard. "Which one," asked Jesus rhetorically, "did the father's bidding?" – because we all know the answer. It's what you do that matters rather than what you say.

In the turn from "What is that to you and to me, my hour has not yet come," to "Fill the jars with water," we see the turn from thinking to action, from the knowledge of who he is to the decision to live out who he is. It's not a small decision. If he does this first miracle he will reveal himself to those who are watching and listening, the servants filling the water pots, his mother and the listening disciples. Perhaps the master of ceremonies and the rest of the guests need not know but it will be the first revelation, the first 'sign' as John calls it. On it rest all the other signs, the healing miracles, the feeding of the 5,000, the raising of Lazarus. Once this first miracle has taken place he will have tacitly acknowledged that his hour has come and the road then leads inexorably from Cana to Jerusalem and to crucifixion. No wonder he hesitated.

There is, I think, a sense of hesitation in the world and in the church. People are changing their careers, their expectations, their priorities. There is a demographic movement by those who can afford it from city to suburbs, from suburbs to the country. Many of us are wondering how our lives and the life of the church will change over the next few months and years. We have lost relations and friends to the virus. We have children and grandchildren who will not be taking significant exams and whose futures look insecure. For some of us, salary or pension or investment income is becoming less reliable. The Anglican church is financially challenged – the diocese of Chelmsford is planning to cut 60 stipendiary posts in the next 18 months. They will not be the only Diocese to make that decision. Christ Church is blessed with a generous congregation and many of you give regularly online, so economically Christ Church will survive this pandemic but that may not be true for all churches.

Individuals, families, hospitals, care homes, churches are all challenged. How do we who are able to survive this, help those who may not get through without help? How far are we prepared to risk our financial security, our mental and physical health and our relationships to help others? Because if we do put our money, security, time and energy into supporting those who need it, we may in turn be economically challenged as the situation worsens. If

we volunteer to help others we may catch the coronavirus ourselves. If we spend too much time supporting others we may fail to support those closest to us.

No wonder he paused before making his decision – paused, and then called for 25 gallons of water which were to become 25 gallons of wine for the biggest celebration anyone could remember. His decision was for a life given to God, whatever the risk. And that for us too is the only way to true joy and life in the midst of coronavirus. The wine wasn't just for the wedding celebration. It was the inauguration of a his new, world-changing ministry which would take him to Jerusalem and death and through death to eternal life to show us that for us too, a life given to God, whatever the risk, is the only way to true joy.