

SERMON – 1/5/22
'Mary the Mother of Jesus'

John 2:1-11

“When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, ‘They have no more wine’.” (John 2:3)

During this season of Easter we are taking some time on Sunday mornings to look at some of the named, but less-well-known, characters who encountered Jesus during His ministry with a view to learning something about our own discipleship from the sometimes quite brief encounters that are described in the Gospels.

Last Sunday, Ian Morrison introduced us to Nathaniel, someone who was definitely a seeker after the truth but who came to Jesus with some fairly deep-seated prejudices and needed to be more open to consider the evidence. Jesus challenged him to 'Come and see' and that is good advice to all of us if we are questioning what it means to follow Jesus today. Come and see; examine the evidence and let it disturb our presuppositions about God.

Today it is Jesus' mother, Mary, who is our focus. In some ways she is a very well-known character in the Gospels but actually, apart from her famous appearances in the accounts of Jesus' birth and His death, most people would not be able to tell you anything about her. This morning's account of Jesus transforming water into wine at a wedding He was attending is also familiar to most of us, but what does it have to teach us today? Well, let's take a look. There are three things I would like to highlight from the account and ask you to think about them.

First of all, in the context of the big messages of the Gospel, what Mary asks Jesus to do here seems to be relatively trivial - in the words of our text this morning: “When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, ‘They have no more wine’.” (v.3) Now this was fundamentally a catering miscalculation, and while it was embarrassing for the host family and could have had fairly major consequences for their social standing and inter-family relationships, you would hardly say this was a matter that

required the involvement of the Son of God. 'They have no more wine.'

Secondly, I would like you to notice that Jesus' response to His mother seems pretty blunt: 'Woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.' (v.4) That would seem to back up the view that this was not a matter worthy of messianic intervention but of course we don't really know what it was that Mary expected Jesus to do – from the Gospels we can't actually say what her expectation of Jesus' ministry as a whole was other than the treasured memories of 30 years previously when He was born – so maybe she wasn't asking Him to perform a miracle; perhaps she was just telling Him the news about the wine running out and not particularly expecting Him to do anything, or perhaps she was thinking that He would round up His disciples and get them to do a run to the equivalent of the local supermarket in order to help save the family name. Either way, why does Jesus make it such an issue by his sharp response? 'My hour has not yet come.'

But the third thing to highlight is the outcome of Mary's request which is for Jesus to bring transformation to the whole situation by turning water from ceremonial washing pots not only into wine but into the choicest of wine and the comment that the apostle John makes at the end of the account: "What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him." (v.11) This is not comparable to the healing of the lame or the blind or the feeding of the five thousand or the stilling of the storm, rather this is 'the first of the signs through which He revealed His glory.'

It would be my contention that Mary is making a simple request at a very ordinary level, but that Jesus is responding in a truly extraordinary way, and that what we need to learn as disciples today is to pray in faith and to expect great things from God in Christ.

What we all need to be willing to learn is that Jesus takes life to a whole new level. There is a wedding going on here with someone whose role it was to be 'master of the banquet' but something had gone badly wrong with the planning if the wine had run out

on day three of what would probably be a seven day feast. How much else could we say that of in our world and in our life experience? There is a world out there and people are in charge of it but, goodness, things are not the way they should be, are they? And for ourselves as individuals there is a life going on and we are in charge of our own progress through it but sometimes – often perhaps – we ake a complete hash of it.

Mary points to Jesus and says to the servants, 'Do whatever He tells you.' And when the master of the banquet tastes the new wine, he is amazed that it is better than he has ever tasted, and what Jesus is saying by His actions is this: "I am the true Master of the Banquet. I am the Lord of the Feast." And in so doing He was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah: "On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken." (Isaiah 25:6-8)

The wine that we share at the Lord's Table is a foretaste of the great banquet to come when all things will reach their fulfilment. Here we taste the promise and we see that the Lord is good. Do you trust in Christ's ability (in Tolkein's striking phrase) 'to make everything sad come untrue'? Ask and you will receive, as Mary discovered. Taste and see, as the master of the wedding banquet in Cana experienced.

It's not insignificant that in the story, the water that Jesus uses for the miracle is taken from the jars that were used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, and by doing so He is declaring that He is accomplishing a reality towards which the sacrificial laws of the Old Testament could only point. Paul describes the Law of Moses as the 'schoolmaster' that leads us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). We need to learn what the Law teaches about our sin and impurity before God so that we are ready to receive the forgiveness and cleansing that Christ provided through His death on the Cross. That is what Jesus is referring to when He says to Mary 'My hour has not yet come.' What He is saying to her in reality is this: "I

have come into the world to bring joy by cleansing humanity from its guilty and shame, but oh Mother, I'm going to have to die to do it. For my people to drink the cup of joy and festival blessing, I am going to have to drink the cup of justice and punishment and death." Here at Cana, Jesus is thinking about what the Book of Revelation will later call 'the wedding feast of the Lamb'. In the midst of the wedding joy at Cana Jesus is sipping the sorrow that is to come for Him so that we who trust in Him can pause in the midst of this world's sorrow today and sip the joy that is to come for us in Christ.

Perhaps Mary's involvement of Jesus in the catering mishap at Cana was entirely innocent – a mother trying to do her bit on a practical level to ease a domestic crisis: 'They have no more wine... Do whatever He says.' But for Jesus it unleashed in His mind the prospect of what lay ahead of Him at the Cross, and in transforming the water that was there for mere religious rituals into the best gourmet wine He opens the curtain just a chink to let us see the unbelievably wonderful prospect of the Kingdom of God.

So what are the challenges that are before you at this time? If you want to learn from Mary about Christian discipleship, then simply bring the challenges you face honestly to Jesus, entrust them to Him, leave them in His hands and be open to however He may lead. Mary said to Jesus 'They have no more wine.' Mary said to the servants 'Do whatever He tells you.'

Let Jesus transform the ordinary for us as well as the cosmic. Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you, taste and see that the Lord is good.