

**Sunday 21 January 2024,
Epiphany 3
Father Timothy Carroll**

Several years ago I received an invitation to a wedding. What was distinctive about this celebration was that it was being documented by the BBC. All of the preparation such as choice of venue, bridesmaids' dresses, menu, leading up to the event was documented as well as the ceremony and reception.

Perhaps you're thinking that I had been invited to a celebrity or royal wedding. Not really, this wedding was the feature of the BBC3 program *'Don't tell the bride'*. Maybe you've seen it, maybe not. The basic premise is that a usually young couple who can't afford a wedding and don't mind being in front of a camera are selected and the catch is that the groom is tasked with fully organizing the wedding with a budget of £12,000 and the bride is to have no contact or input. Predictably the groom ended up spending as much on the stag do as the brides dress, didn't pick the stately castle but hosted in outdoor tents and organized a hog roast for the meal that excluded his Turkish in-laws religious preferences. A few days before the wedding the groom had spent nearly all his budget and had one hundred pounds left for flowers and wine. In the end he had to settle for wine that was on offer 3 bottles for £10. Having said that the playful, fun and slightly shameless approach the wedding meant that the day, surprisingly, was a success.

Which brings us to these mornings reading where the issue of a wedding failure, wine shortage and wine quality is prominent. In fact, the issue isn't just wine shortage but of shame that at this wedding celebration in which guests are supposed to be experiencing rich hospitality there is instead an embarrassing revelation of poverty. Curiously we hear that it's probably only Mary, Jesus' mother, along with the waiters who are aware of the potential awkward and shameful revelation that the party is going to probably wind down. The headwaiter doesn't seem to know anything's going on and the groom doesn't seem have realized this. So why does Mary?

The cultural etiquette at this time was it was a BYO – the community invited was expected to contribute to the wine. Did Mary, Jesus, and the disciples, perhaps due to voluntary poverty not bring any wine? Is this why Mary is the first to spot this? Is there potential shame to befall her and Jesus? We can't know for sure. But this shortage of wine was going to publicly shame someone, quite possibly the wedding hosts because it would reveal that they don't have the support from their community.

There is a curious exchange between Mary and Jesus. Something in that Mother Son relationship has given Mary reason to believe that it's her son's time to reveal his Glory for the first time. At first Jesus doesn't seem that bothered by the whole business, in fact sounds somewhat indifferent. However following Jesus' indifference a miracle occurs, the first miracle recorded in John. And this miracle is not just for the sake of a miracle, it's not Jesus showing off. But this what is described in the Gospel of John as a sign - a miracle

with the purpose of revealing the Glory of the Messiah who is dwelling amongst the people. A miracle which is a sign to the disciples that the one they follow is the Messiah, is word made flesh. Again what is curious about this story the midst of this large gathering not many present know what is happening amongst them. Those who know what has occurred are the disciples, Mary and it also tell us the waiters also know. It is only this group who have any clue that someone present at this event has performed this miraculous sign.

Which goes to show that the Glory of God is revealed in the most counter cultural ways, it isn't those with the highest status who Jesus is first revealed to but the waiters. It's appropriate that the servant king is beginning to be revealed amongst those who serve. We is a reminder to us, that we can encounter the glory of God in our service to others.

Why water into wine? Why so much water into so much of the best wine? Someone who can perform such a miracle is certainly worthy of our attention. But the scripture tells us it is a sign

This first sign is so beautiful so outrageously because it reveals the abundance that is to be found in God. God is not a God of scarcity but of abundance. This is a sign of the abundance to come in eternity - but this is also about God's abundance now.

Where is the abundance that Jesus talks about in John 10? *I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*

Where is that Glory, where is the spirit of abundance? Well the same spirit who descended on Christ last week at his baptism, is sent by the resurrected Christ on Christ's followers, through the Spirit Christ is with us and in us and we are in Christ. And the goal of the Christ's spirit's anointed mission is for human beings and the entire creation to flourish life in the everlasting kingdom is what all of us are made for.

The kingdom is the perfection of that abundant life. So as a Church, like the disciples, the Glory of God's abundance has been revealed. There is no lack in God, we have bought into the idea of scarcity, of not enough, but trust in God reveals that there is an abundance of gifting, resources and love in our world. Trust in God means trust in abundance over scarcity.

This morning's passage is the revelation that where the shame of poverty and social stigma like at the wedding could have been experienced, God's glory enters that messy reality and reveals the abundance of God's. Which is the message we need to be reminded of - we don't need to buy into the myth of scarcity but trust that God has provided enough. We are carriers of God's glory, we carry that hope. The hope and the life found in the abundance of God. Amen