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## Sermon

### ***Epiphany: At Cana and in the Spirit***

**John 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11**

16<sup>th</sup> January 2022

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This is the second Sunday of Epiphany. You will recall that Epiphany means revealing. It is the season when we celebrate the revealing of Christ to the world.

From very early days, the church kept January 6<sup>th</sup> as the Festival of the Epiphany. On that Feast, they read the nativity of Jesus, the coming of the wise men, the baptism of Jesus, and the miracle at Cana. And so too over this period, we have read the same passages and now the miracle of Cana. Why was this reading included? Because John wrote,

<sup>2:11</sup> This, the first of Jesus' miraculous signs, he performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

John tells us that in this miracle, Jesus gave a sign of who he was. Who else but God can turn water into wine? It is not a minor fix, it is a creative miracle. It showed that God was at work in Jesus. In this miracle, Jesus revealed his glory.

### **Canna**

The exact location of Cana is uncertain because there are two modern villages which both could be the location of ancient Cana. Kafr Kanna is about 6km north of Nazareth while Khirbet Cana is 14km north of Nazareth. Yet, either site was close enough for villagers to walk to a neighbouring village for a wedding.

### **Stone Jars**

The stone water jars are interesting. They were made by turning blocks of limestone on a lathe driven by two men.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, such a quarry site from the first century was found between Nazareth and Kafr Kanna.<sup>2</sup> They were expensive – it was cheaper and more common to use pottery. Stone was used because the purity laws.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.holyfaith.org.uk/index.php/devotional-resources/meditations/miracles-of-jesus/water-into-wine-at-cana?showall=1>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/2000-year-old-stone-workshop-discovered-near-where-jesus-turned-water-into-wine/>



1. A manmade cave filled with partially-completed chalkstone vessels was recently unearthed in Galilee. The ancient vessel factory dates to about 2,000 years ago. (Image credit: Samuel Magal/Israel Antiquities Authority)

If anything unclean touched a clay jar the contents had to be thrown away and the jar smashed. For example, the Law stipulated that if an unclean animal such as a gecko died and fell in a clay pot, it was to be broken.<sup>3</sup>

However, stone was considered impervious to impurity and so did not have to be destroyed. For that reason, people who were more concerned about purity laws tended to have stone jars even though they were more expensive. In Jerusalem, a house was excavated which had been burnt when Jerusalem was sacked by the Romans. In the house, there were also six stone water jars. A tablet gave the name of the household which showed it was a priest's house.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars suggest that the household in Cana may also have been a priestly family since they had these stone water jars.

A record has been found of priestly families living in Galilee and even specifically in Cana in the time of Jesus. We know that Mary was related to a priestly family (since her kinswoman Elizabeth was of the house of Levi.)

Wedding feasts were a major time of celebration. The celebration would run for at least a few days up to a whole week. The importance of hospitality was so great, that not to provide food and drink for guests was considered equivalent to theft! So we can see why Mary was so concerned when she learnt that the wine had run out – it would be a devastating faux pas for the couple and their families. She asked Jesus to help and he did. I won't explore that conversation, important though it is, since I have considered it on a previous preaching of this passage.

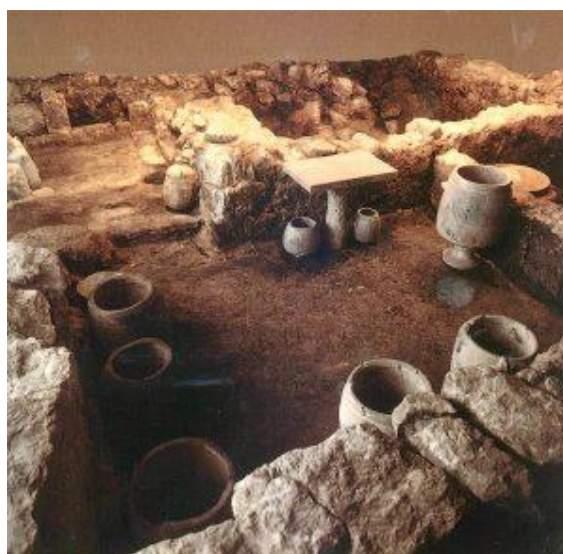
What happened was a miracle of generous provision. John strongly emphasised to us, the quantity and the quality of the wine. He made the point that there were six jars – all filled to the brim - each holding 20-30 gallons. That is about 100 dozen bottles of wine. That is a lot of wine!

As to quality – the reaction of the Master of the Banquet (the MC) says it all - this was not any wine; it was the best!

## Moses

Let's take a moment to compare this with Moses. When he was commissioned by God to his role at the Burning Bush, he was given signs to use to convince the people that God was empowering him. There were three at that stage:

1. He was to throw his staff on the ground and it became a serpent. Then when he picked it up, it was restored to a rod.
2. He was to put his hand into his gown and take it out and it was leprous. Then he again put his hand into and out of his gown, it would be clean again.



2. The Burnt House, Jerusalem

<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 11:29-33. See also Leviticus 15:11-12.

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burnt\\_House](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burnt_House)

3. **Exodus 4:9** "But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground."

The third of the signs given to Moses was to turn water into blood. This would be the basis for the first of the plagues of Egypt. But with Jesus, his first sign was to turn water into wine.

The transformation of water was an execution of judgement in Moses' hands. And he was the law-giver, the great judge and ruler of Israel. John says in his gospel prologue, "the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."<sup>5</sup>

The transformation of water at Jesus' hands was to a better drink – a drink for celebration. The Messianic age is often described in terms of abundance in the Old Testament.

Amos 9:13 "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when ... new wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills."

The abundance of wine is a sign that Jesus is the Messiah and is in keeping with the idea of the Messianic banquet. One of the titles of the Messiah is the Bridegroom. The people of God are corporately the bride and he is the bridegroom. Here, Jesus attends and blesses a wedding. It is a pre-figuring of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

## Epistle

We also have before us the start of a new set of readings from First Corinthians following Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts. I want to relate this miracle at Cana to the spiritual gifts.

When Jesus turned water into wine, he was using the gift of miracles and probably the gift of faith. In the Epistle we heard about the gifts given to believers by the Holy Spirit. These are called *charismata* in Greek – little grace gifts. These are nine ways the Holy Spirit works through Christians to equip the Church for ministry. Paul emphasises they are all from God - given so we can serve and help each other.

Importantly in this season of Epiphany, Paul wrote in verse 7, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." That word manifestation is *phanerosis* – you can hear it has the same root as epi-phaney. It is the revealing of the Holy Spirit. When we move in the spiritual gifts we reveal the Holy Spirit.

We can group the nine gifts that Paul lists into three categories:

### *Prophecy, tongues and interpretation;*

These are spoken gifts which allow people to pass on God's words of encouragement and upbuilding to his people. Prophecy is given in the local language. Tongues and interpretation act together to deliver a message in an unknown language and then interpret it into the local language. The sheer strangeness of the unknown language seems to act as a flag to draw attention to the fact that God is at work. It is also an encouragement that something spiritual is happening.

### *Knowledge, wisdom and discernment of spirits*

The information gifts give us insight into knowledge we need for ministry, or wisdom about a situation or discernment of what spiritual power is at work in a person. For example, I remember an Easter service here when several words of knowledge were offered to the meeting. Anne had the single and rather strange word, "gastrocnemius!" It turned out it is the name of the calf muscle and there was a visitor with us that day who had severe pain in her leg. She had seen the doctor before the weekend and he had told her the name of the muscle. She had been sitting there wondering if she could endure the pain until the Tuesday when the surgery would reopen, when we announced that maybe someone had a problem related to the gastrocnemius and that prayer was available. What an encouragement that God knew her need and would heal her!

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<sup>5</sup> John 1:17

In our practice of prayer ministry we deliberately leave time for the Holy Spirit to give direction in this way. Sometimes it is a picture or a simple word or idea which alerts us to the approach to take in prayer.

### *Miracles, faith and healings.*

These are power Gifts. Miracles is more literally: "the workings of powers." It suggests there are many different forms the gift may take. We can think of Jesus multiplying food, stilling the storm, causing the miraculous catch of fish, walking on water, raising the dead and turning water into wine.

The gift of faith is an endowment of faith to believe for a miraculous event. It is clearly not saving faith, because all Christians have that whereas this gift is given to some only. At Cana, Mary may have had this gift to believe that Jesus could do something about the impossible situation. Jesus appears to have had it to believe for this miracle to occur.

Healings cover the many ways in which God heals through his people.

## **Water Jar Christians?**

Reading the gospel and epistle passages together, I was struck by a comparison of us to the water jars. The jars are natural stone containers full of water. When Jesus acts and they contain excellent wine. He has changed the natural, ordinary into something special and impacting.

There is a strong Biblical thread of comparing God's people to clay pots, with the idea that God is like a potter and is free to mould us as he wishes. We find that in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations and developed by Paul three times in the New Testament.

To Timothy, he wrote:

In a wealthy home some utensils are made of gold and silver, and some are made of wood and clay. The expensive utensils are used for special occasions, and the cheap ones are for everyday use. If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work.<sup>6</sup>

Remember that the water jars in Cana were set aside for purification use.

Then in his second letter to the Corinthians (4:6), he wrote,

For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.<sup>7</sup>

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit and move in a spiritual gift, it is like the water becoming wine – the ordinary has become special. Yet we are just the containers – fragile clay jars holding a great treasure. Our frailty and weakness, makes it clear that the power is from God not from us.

Let me give you an example. Last week at the 10am service, at the end of communion, I had a slight check within and the thought that there might be a message to be spoken out. So I offered that opportunity and immediately Torben gave a prophetic message. This is the transcript:

Fear not, I am God. I hold all things in my hand. It is mine; it is my creation that you see about you. Fear not, I have called you by name. You are mine. I will rescue you and redeem you. I have lifted you on high. You are mine – fear not. Fear not for what others fear. Follow me that you may know me, that you may know my love; that you may know my salvation – for I have called you.

I know that prophecy had particular application to one person facing a challenging time, who was moved to tears by it. I suspect it had more general application to encourage most of us.

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<sup>6</sup> 2 Timothy 2:20-21 (NLT)

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:6-7 (NLT)

But I have quoted it to encourage us all in the exercise of the gifts. I had only a slight inkling there might be some message to come. Torben told me afterwards, that he had had a sense of words inside him needing to be spoken but he didn't know what they were until he started speaking.

We both offered ourselves in our limited human weakness and the Holy Spirit added the extra to make it significant. If you will, he changed our water into wine. It revealed his presence. It revealed God's care and heart for his people. And that is what spiritual gifts should do – encourage people and glorify God.

## **Conclusion**

In the miracle at Cana, we see Jesus joined in the celebration of a couple's wedding. We are not told who they are, or why Mary, Jesus and his disciples were invited. When there was a significant difficulty, he acted with kindness and generosity. He provided six large jars of the best wine.

If his nature is to be so kind and generous, can we not allow our expectations to grow that he will act with the same kindness and generosity towards us in our various needs. Will he not be good and generous to us as well?