

# **New Kilpatrick**

## **Sermon**

**11th January 2018**

**John 2:1-11**

**Spirit... may your imagination find a home in us... your questions speak through our faith... and your intent and vision... shape our every step... In these ways may we be inspired... encouraged and called into your way... So be it... Amen**

And so there will be a real life game of thrones this year... when the royal wedding clashes with the FA cup final... and that's not the only controversy so far... It has been reported that the homeless of Windsor... will be removed from the streets... to make way for a national party... in a heady mix of weddings and football... but even weddings on a more simple scale have their stresses...

My sister-in-law is a registrar... down in Ayrshire... She was taking a wedding at Culzean Castle... outside... on the lawn... by the cliff edge... The wedding schedule... which you absolutely have to have... It is the only thing you do... except a bride, groom and two witnesses... The schedule was there on the table... under her folder... which she lifted to check something momentarily...

As she did so... the schedule caught a gust of wind... and before anyone could do anything... it flew up off the table and over the cliff... to rest precariously in some gorse...

Despite partly climbing down said cliff to try and rescue it... and despite the caretaker constructing some combination of a broom attached to window poles... with which he lent out a castle window 50 feet above plunging shoreline to bring back the schedule... it refused to be caught... and was last seen on its way to Ailsa Craig in the next gust of wind...

Either of these scenarios would have been better than what actually happened for the groom's family at the wedding in Cana... Running out of wine... was the greater controversy... because no wine meant no blessing... This was a week-long wedding and by day three there was a wine drought... This would be the talk of the steamie for a generation...

But... thankfully... Jesus had a mother who spotted the problem... as well as the solution... and as only a mother can... told Jesus to do something about it... and quietly... Jesus averted impending disaster... but went one step further... and showed so much abundance and quality of wine... the miracle at Cana has stuck... and become a story about the abundance of the kingdom...

That is certainly one way of reading the story... But this is the Bible... and it is John's Gospel... so face value isn't the only way to hear this story... Beneath that version... there are many layers of meaning... which some of the first hearers will have immediately recognised... and found this to be a story that is more than a miracle... Indeed it is said the one who focusses on the miracle itself... is a long way from understanding it... because the miracle is simply an aid in saying something far more... so let's tell it again...

On the third day... This first phrase of the story... would have those in the early church... link the whole story to the resurrection... so John is about to offer an image that speaks into the third day after Jesus death... This isn't just a story about an event... it is a story about meaning helping us understand who Jesus is...

It is also a wedding... that is kind of stating the obvious except wedding banquet stories... are always stories about the kingdom... the Reign of God is often spoken of as a party... the parable of the bridesmaids... or the parable of the wedding feast... This is a picture of the kingdom coming up... come and see...

But that idea itself needs to be explored more... Jesus uses banquets and parties to describe the kingdom... Perhaps that is not always people's experience of the church... where rote religion... and ritual observance don't always gladden the heart... Yet with the first signs of the kingdom breaking into the world... Jesus doesn't call a session meeting to discuss... Jesus chooses to attend a wedding feast...

A party... a festival... is the go-to image for Jesus... of what the kingdom of God looks like... a celebration of the fullness of life...

And that dichotomy between the experience of religion... and the ways of the kingdom... goes to the very heart of the story... because Jesus does something quite subtle and

brilliant... He doesn't conjure up new flagons of wine... Jesus uses the old ones... the existing pitchers... that were meant for ritual washing...

He takes what symbolises the old religious rituals... that effectively divided people into clean and unclean... ritually pure and ritually un-pure... and used them for this radical new purpose... of inclusion to an extravagant party... and it was extravagant as the best wine was just about to flow... where what was the past had been replaced by a new way that brought the fullness of life... one that the old ways did not make possible...

The water jars represent the law of Moses... and the party that runs dry... is a statement about the old rituals running dry... they no longer hold the fullness of life... The old order is being replaced... "They have no wine" Mary says... in other words... they have no zest for life anymore...

Now it is a different kind of order coming... new abundance... new wine... and Mary continues... "Do whatever he tells you"... that instruction is not just to the servants... but to the early church... Do whatever *Jesus* says... follow *his* way... for that is how you will find abundant life...

This first story in John... is the scene setter... the first **sign** as John calls it... the first sign that everything is changing...

And the darker question behind this could be... what must be abandoned... that new wine of the kingdom can be poured today...

There is so much going on in the world... where the old vessels just cannot contain either meaning or purpose for the world any more... Our institutions are becoming outdated... the understanding of the way the western world worked is now confused... we are making riskier choices about our future... of which we fear...

Well I know I do... but there are two ways to react to that... One is that we buckle down... and circle the wagons... and become stricter... and have clearer identification of those who are like us... putting ourselves first... We create both ritual and physical barriers... strengthen borders... build walls... we define people with ever greater scrutiny... so

clearly seen with the immigration, emigration debate... and thus we become less generous to those in need because we create fear of the other... trust them less...

In other words we strengthen the old rituals and beliefs... thinking they will keep us safe... pure... and we reduce ourselves... becoming more definite and exact about who is in and who is out... more prone to be divisive... The old water pitchers are kept filled with water and we insist on them being used...

The other way to react is to enlarge our being... be open to the possibility that hospitality and generosity can supersede narrowness and fear... and that the rituals that make us a community... are better filled with joy... than justification... abundance rather than austerity... that we dare taste the wine... that speaks of banquet... festival... celebration... rituals that build relationships that bringing people together as weddings do... and it is perhaps this latter understanding where we tend to focus our faith as New Kilpatrick...

In reading John's Gospel in this way... this is where Jesus seems to prefer to be... and where... according to this first sign... Jesus implies the kingdom is to be found...

Come and see...

#### References

David Lose      John 2:1-11      <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/01/john-21-11/>

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