

Lord God, by your Holy Spirit, in the midst of lockdown, unlock our hearts and turn us to face Jesus. Amen.

- As I was thinking about that wedding at Cana it hit me between the eyes. They'd invited Jesus but they weren't expecting him to be there! After all, just a few days earlier, Jesus had been miles away at the River Jordan with John the Baptist. That's why the reading begins, '*On the third day...*' And then Jesus reappears with up to a dozen hard drinking fishermen whom he has called to follow just 4 days before in the preceding chapter. They were welcome because weddings were a bit of an open invitation but they weren't expected. It was as if Jesus and his disciples gatecrashed the wedding and finished the wine. It was their fault they'd run out.
- You can imagine Mary looking on in anguished embarrassment as Peter downs yet another glass of Pinot Noir. '*They have no wine*', she hisses to Jesus. But her maverick Son is unconcerned. "*Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.*"
- St John, the writer of the Gospel, calls the miracle '*the first of his signs*'. It was a sign of heaven and earth clearing intersecting, something miraculous happening which not only transformed the wedding but also points out how Jesus affects, almost interferes with, our lives.
- Because, there's times when Jesus seems to gatecrash our lives, in much the same way in which he gatecrashed the wedding. We know we've invited him, but we're not really expecting him. And then he appears and transforms everything. I don't know if you can think of an occasion which Jesus turned upside down? Something you worried out, inexplicably worked out for the best; someone makes a chance remark and your life takes a completely new direction. As people of faith it's common to attribute this type of thing to the providence of God working in the world; to attribute them to Jesus.
- But there's other times when actually the presence of Jesus is disturbing and seems to make things worse. And certainly at the start of this story that's what seemed to have happened. Jesus and his raucous new friends were in danger of wrecking a bride's special day!
- It might be your partner is not a Christian and resents the time you spend in church. It might be that you've had a glass of wine and you'd like another but you know you've got to drive home. You're sure you'll be ok but this nagging little voice keeps saying "*But what if ...*", and you'd rather it shut up. It might be a decision at work that your boss has made about which you don't feel entirely comfortable because it didn't seem ethical
- Following Jesus in all these situations is disturbing because we have divided loyalties. All examples of Jesus gatecrashing our lives and causing mayhem! That's what happened to Mary at the wedding. And her response gives us the direction to aim at. She says '*to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'*', pointing to Jesus. And what he might tell you to do, might be rather surprising, like at the wedding, and not at all what you'd expect.
- And that's really good advice when we are in circumstances like this. When Jesus gatecrashes our lives, '*Do whatever he tells you.*', if you want the transformation to occur. Just don't expect '*whatever he tells you*' to necessarily be the same as what you want. After all, I'm sure Jesus didn't want to be crucified! But it was only after the crucifixion than the transformation of resurrection occurred.
- Dates are important here. We've mentioned St John reports the wedding took place '*On the third day...*' after Jesus was baptized in the Jordan. Is this a link to another third day at the other end of the gospel when Jesus has completed the calling, the vocation God the Father asked of him and rose from the dead, on the third day? When Jesus' time had finally come? Life and earth were transformed forever. The new wine of the Kingdom breaking through once again into our lives.
- But there are other dates. If you count back seven days from the wedding at Cana you get to the beginning if the account of John the Baptist in verse 19 of chapter 1. Seven days! The number of days mentioned in Genesis chapter 1. The six days of creation plus the seventh day of rest. Yet another example of how God is intimately involved with, in love with, his created world.
- Early in Genesis is also the setting of our first reading. Genesis 14 in fact. This is a curious little passage that contains hidden treasures and some quite bizarre aspects, but for our purposes, it contains a blessing on

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Abraham by Melchizedek of Salem, who was a priest and also a king. He asks a blessing of God most high, the maker of heaven and earth harking back to the creation just a few chapters before. Listen ‘King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. He blessed Abraham and said, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth.’ In the bible a superior always blesses and inferior, so Melchizedek, priest and king is obviously someone of considerable importance. Indeed in those days, as in these, you were either priest or king, never both, with only one other exception. Can you work out who?

- We heard Melchizedek brings out bread and wine, a free gift from God and they have a celebratory meal. A bit like the new wine Jesus brings out at the celebratory wedding meal.
- And indeed in the Book of Hebrews in the New Testament, the writer compares Melchizedek to Jesus the other priest and King. Did you work it out? The High Priest Jesus offered his own body as a sacrifice and was appointed King of all creation by his Father. There’s other links too. Melchizedek was King of Salem , likely to be the early name for Jerusalem where the later priest and King Jesus offered his sacrifice.
- So we have Jesus, the priest and King, Lord of all creation, transforming the everyday nature of our lives, when we manage to obey what his mother advises, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ All good worthy spiritual stuff, but how does it help us today when we are feeling variously ground down, or anxious, or exhausted or depressed or frightened by the Corona virus? Or a 110 others things. Insert your own adjective!
- How do we make the wedding at Cana a great party to which we are invited today?
- I am becoming increasingly convinced that the only way to healthily survive the pandemic is by looking to Christ as Lord. As King. As priest who has offered a sacrifice, his own body, for us. ‘Do whatever he tells you.’
- Looking to Jesus as Lord and King; relying on his sacrifice brings hope. It allows love. It offers a meaning. And therefore it provides resilience. Because if you know where you’re going and you’ve got a sure hope you’re going to get there, then it helps transform your outlook from one of being ground down to one of determination. It provides resilience. And that’s even without the Holy Spirit working any other miraculous transformation of water into wine.
- The front line staff in the NHS are doing the most amazing job These are people with a vocation, a calling. For the vast majority, it’s not just a job, it’s a way of life. It’s not what they do – it’s who they are. Not surprisingly they are feeling the cost of it emotionally and mentally. The language used is similar to that used of front line forces returning from a war zone. It’s likely many will suffer PTSD as a result of the experiences of the last 12 months and the next 6. We’ve been hearing about the need to provide far better provision for mental health support for them, to help them come to terms with the extraordinary levels of stress and expectations placed on them and the hundreds of life and death decisions which they have had to make each 12 hour shift.
  - All that’s all really important. But I wonder how successful it will be?
- Human efforts at healing the whole person, rather than just healing the physical body seem to revolve around placing the emphasis on the person who is struggling. Time to explore. Time to come to terms. Time to understand the person beneath the pain. Time to express what has really happened in their lives.
  - Again, all good stuff. But still healing seems to be slow and patchy and some people never manage it.
  - If you are to ‘Do whatever he tells you’ it takes the emphasis off you personally and puts it on the calling that Jesus is asking you to follow. It takes the emphasis off the sacrifice you have made and the commitment you have given and places it firmly on Jesus and the roll he has called you to fulfil.
- And that’s what enables the hope to grow and the resilience to flourish and the healing to occur. And occur far more frequently and effectively and swiftly than even years of expensive self-obsessive therapy.
- So if you are struggling to make sense of life at the moment. If you are exhausted, or merely uninspired. If you can’t understand what is going on in the world or if you simply can’t see the relevance of a great party when you can’t even meet one other person indoors and don’t see much to celebrate, the message today is to follow the advice of Mary, the mother of God and turn towards Jesus, invite him to gatecrash your life and ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ That way he’ll turn it upside down and lead you towards greater resilience and meaning.
- That’s transformation. That’s relevance. That’s life in all its fullness and blessings from God most high. Amen.