

***Father take my words and transform them, so that we might hear what you are saying to each one of us today.  
Amen***

I wonder how you feel when you receive an invitation to a wedding or hear that someone has got engaged? It is usually a time of great joy and everyone is happy for the couple. Yesterday we had the marriage preparation day here at St Mary's and seeing the three couples, so obviously in love with each other and anticipating their marriages, expectant for what is to come, was a delight to behold.

In today's gospel reading, we are invited to watch a video of a wedding which Jesus, his mother and his disciples are all attending. I hope you have brought your hats with you and dressed up for the occasion. It is at this wedding that John records the first of seven signs performed by Jesus (more often referred to by us as miracles) which appear in his gospel, moments when heaven and earth connect and the transforming power of God's love bursts into the world.

If we pause the video at this point and look closely, we can see that Jesus is amongst the guests at the wedding. He doesn't stand out, he blends in with the other guests and yet as we will see, when Jesus is present, John tells us we should expect the unexpected, because heaven and earth are close. I wonder if we have come here this morning expecting Jesus to be here? And are we anticipating a miracle as we gather around the communion table?

PAUSE

Back to the wedding. Some scholars think it could have been a family members wedding some even suggesting it may have been one of Jesus' brothers, but whoever's wedding it was, we know that Jewish weddings were great affairs that lasted for many days. We are told at the beginning that this is the third day of the wedding which is very significant day as it is the day before the couple will actually exchange their vows and be officially married – a day pregnant with expectation of what is to come. It is significant in the context of the whole gospel story where Jesus is seen as the bridegroom coming for his bride, the church, linking to the resurrection on the third day, a day of great joy and also a foretaste of the great heavenly feast when Christ comes again.

Jewish weddings were community events and everyone would be responsible for ensuring there was food and wine so that all the guests could enjoy the festivities. And it is probably for this reason that Mary gets involved when the wine is running out. If it did run out, it wouldn't have just been an inconvenience like when the buffet runs out of sausage rolls, it would have been a social disaster, bringing great shame on the family. And it is this which Mary seems to want to avoid and so she brings the potential problem to Jesus' attention, believing he will do something about it and in so doing she births his ministry just as she gave birth to him.

Let's pause the video again and look at Mary to see what she has to teach us about talking to Jesus, about prayer. Mary saw a need and she took it to Jesus and interceded on behalf of the bridegroom and his family. She believed that Jesus would intervene, would do something to answer her prayers. In many ways running out of wine may seem like something not to bother Jesus with – what could he do – but Mary knew differently. Just as then, Jesus is interested in all aspects of our lives and the lives of those we love and so we can ask him to act, we can intercede on behalf of others, having care, concern and compassion for those around us, just as Mary did.

I'm sure we do this, but I wonder if we have the same confidence when we pray as Mary had when she took this situation to Jesus, as there appears to have been no doubt in her mind that he would do something about it.

PAUSE

As the video restarts, we see Jesus reacting somewhat negatively to his mother's request, asking what the situation has got to do with him and suggesting that he's not ready to begin revealing more of who he is. But she doesn't take no for an answer, she doesn't give up. It's as if, as his mother, she recognises that he needs a push to get started to begin the ministry which will lead to the salvation of the world. So ignoring Jesus, Mary turns to the servants and says, what I think are some of the most important words in this gospel reading – do whatever he tells you to do.

And then she stands back and watches. She of all people understands that her child is special and that he has come into the world to bring heaven and earth closer. Rather than holding him back, she encourages, pushes him into his god-given work, whilst she watches and ponders. As an aside, I find it interesting, that the next time she is mentioned in John's gospel is when she is again standing back watching, this time watching her son die.

Pausing the video once again - do we also need that push sometimes, someone to say, you've got this, you can do this, to believe in us and give us the opportunity to use the gifts that God has given us, the gifts we read about in our Corinthians reading? And sometimes do we need to be the one doing the pushing, recognising a gift in someone else and asking God to help us to help them to see it and use it.

PAUSE

The video moves on and we see the servants doing exactly as Mary has told them to do - Doing what Jesus asks – they fill 6 large jugs to the brim with water.

Watching them filling the jugs, which wouldn't have been an easy task as it involved a lot of water – in the region of 120 – 180 gallons, the same amount as would be needed to fill 3 wheelie bins, I often wonder what was going through their minds. Did they think why are we doing this? What good is this going to do? Surely we would be better popping to the corner shop and buying some wine, and a myriad other questions. But in amongst their doubts and questions, there seems to be a sense of expectancy, a capturing of the faith that Mary had in Jesus, an acknowledgement that he was someone different.

Jesus then tells them to draw some of the water out and take it to the chief steward.

They knew all they had put in the jugs was water but again they did exactly what Jesus told them to do again, and discovered that the water had been transformed into the very best wine, the Chateau Neuf de Pape of the time. A potential disaster had been averted. The party could go on and now the wine most definitely won't run out as there is wine in abundance!

Pausing the video again, we notice that it was when the servants did what Jesus asked them to do that the miracle took place. The same is true today, as when we listen to Jesus, and do what he says however hard it appears, our lives and situations are transformed – the impossible becomes possible, the ordinary is turned into the extraordinary. Mary already knows this to be true, as when the Angel visited her and told her she was going to have a baby, Luke tells us that she said 'How can this be since I am a virgin' but then the angel explains that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and declares that nothing is impossible with God. And then she utters those amazing words 'let it be with me according to your word.' And maybe the servants see something of this in her and that is why they do what Jesus tells them to do however absurd it seems. Is this our experience, do we truly believe that nothing is impossible with God?

PAUSE

The final scene on the video shows the abundant amount of wine and the joy that it brought to the wedding guests, and in particular the bridegroom but it does not record what Mary or Jesus did next, but in the credits, John tells us something really important – this sign displayed Jesus' glory and the disciples believed in him.

The disciples who are at the wedding have already listened to Jesus and done what he has asked them to do – they have given up their jobs, left their homes and followed him. Simon has even changed his name! It is to those who are already following Jesus that his glory is first revealed, in the middle of a party, where Jesus was sharing in the joy and fun of the occasion with his friends and family. He was doing life with them and this means that this sign, this miracle is recorded for us who are already following Jesus, who have received the gift of the Holy Spirit at our baptism. The transformation of water into wine, signifies the effect that Jesus can have on our lives. John tells us later in his gospel that Jesus has come so that we might have life, and have it abundantly.' He wants us to have wine! Just as everyone at the wedding was given something good, so to have we been given a wide variety of spiritual gifts and these gifts are to help us serve God in our daily lives. Jesus didn't do this miracle on his own – he needed his mother to prompt him and the servants to fill the jugs and draw out the water – and so today he needs us, filled with his spirit, to use our gifts to help share the extravagant glory of his love with others. So as we go into this week, will we follow Mary's instructions and do what he is asking us to do because then we will see that by God's grace, the water of our everyday existence is turned into wine for the kingdom, revealing God's glory.

***In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen***