

We continue in the season of Epiphany where the focus of our Gospel readings is on events revealing the identity of Jesus to those around him. John's gospel is kind of like a treasure hunt with carefully laid *but sometimes hidden* clues for us to follow. Throughout John's gospel, the miracles that Jesus performs are called **signs**, because they point people to the truth of who Jesus is. John proclaims his hope for those who read his gospel in chapter 20:30-31 where he writes: "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

John was most likely Jewish and probably wrote his gospel with the assumption that his cryptic clues would be understood by his audience. So we have the challenge of trying to make sense of these clues imbedded in the stories of Jesus, so that we can take hold of the prize, the treasure at the end, which is **to have life in his name**.

In our reading today from John 2, the sign that points to the identity of Jesus is **the miracle of the water turned to wine**, at the wedding at Cana. The first four words at the beginning of our passage, John states that this event takes place "on the third day." When you look back to chapter 1, to see what this "third day" might be referring to, you don't really get anywhere, so I'm thinking that when John includes this 'third day', it's intentional - it's a cryptic clue linked to the most potent sign ever of the identity of Jesus, as after he is crucified he is buried in a tomb and **on the third day** he rose again, in miraculous vindication of all that he had said and done before.

But back to the wedding. Jesus and his disciples and his mother are all guests at this wedding, where Mary suddenly notices that the wine has completely run out. Jesus seems pretty unperturbed – he’s simply enjoying himself as a guest at a wedding with his friends. So far, no miraculous signs have yet drawn any attention to him; no controversial teaching or confrontation with the Pharisees or Religious Elders. But Mary seems to know what he’s capable of – after all, his identity had been revealed to her even before his conception - and now she has compassion for the bridegroom hosting the wedding, as it was the bridegroom’s responsibility to ensure there was enough food and wine for the several days of celebration. To run out of wine wouldn’t just be embarrassing, it would mean a loss of honor for the whole family.

“Woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come.” You might think Jesus’ words would’ve discouraged Mary, but instead she responds by telling the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them. And for whatever reason, Jesus decides to act.

With its great feast, an *earthly* wedding is like a picture of the **heavenly wedding feast** referred to in the parable of the Wedding Banquet found in Matthew and Luke’s gospels. The symbolism continues with the figure of **the Bridegroom**. At the wedding at Cana, the bridegroom has been rescued from dishonour by Jesus, who stands as the *symbolic Bridegroom* of his bride - his people. We can find reference to Jesus as the ‘bridegroom’ all over the New Testament. For example, in John 3:29, John the Baptist points to Jesus as the symbolic bridegroom when he says, “The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.”

So the setting of the Wedding of Cana and the role of the bridegroom both provide a good deal of symbolism on which we can reflect – *but there is more*. “They have no wine,” Mary says to Jesus. **The end of the wine** is a cryptic clue pointing to the effective **end of the old covenant**, and the fact that God was now going to do something entirely new. The prophet Isaiah spoke of God’s desire to be a renewing Savior to his people, in chapter 43 – thus says the Lord: “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a **new** thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.”

The wine at the Wedding at Cana symbolises **life** and **joy**. Psalm 104 speaks of the Lord providing plants to cultivate for food and wine, which gladdens human hearts. The prophets foretold of an abundance of wine in the Messianic days, as is written in Amos 9: “New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills.” The wine also brings to mind the wine that was poured out at **the Last Supper**, symbolising the **blood** that would be spilled as Jesus’ side is pierced to prove that he is dead as he hung on the cross – the blood of the sacrificial Lamb of God - the sacrifice that brought an end to separation from God.

At the Wedding at Cana, **the water jars** that Jesus uses to perform this miracle are described as ‘the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing.’ In using these particular jars, Jesus was making a statement that God was doing a **new** thing from within the **old** system – bringing purification to God’s people in a whole new way.

The jars of water which are turned into wine held around 25 gallons of water each, and are filled 'to the brim', symbolizing through this passage the abundance of God's provision and God's deep desire that we would recognise who Jesus is, so that we would receive the fullness of his abundant grace.

We weren't at the wedding in Cana. We didn't actually see the miraculous **sign** of water transformed into wine. We didn't see first-hand any of the signs in John's gospel. But as Jesus says in John 20, 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'. Jesus is the one who has come to do a **new** thing – to transform the old covenant of **law** that became corrupt into a new covenant of **grace**, fulfilled through faith and trust in what Christ has done, and what he's able to do for us when we allow him into our hearts and minds.

As we believe and trust in Jesus, we in turn become signs ourselves, pointing to Jesus in our conversations with all those with whom we share our lives. In times of joy and in our struggles, we can be powerful witnesses to the generous and caring nature of God, who offers to all the new wine of the kingdom, providing for us a transformed way of living in the name of Jesus. When we show genuine love, affection and honor to one another; when we're patient in our own suffering and have the grace to bless our oppressors, we become signs that point to Jesus our rescuer – the one who meets our needs in times of crisis and times of joy; the one who removes our shame and offers the very best of the kingdom. May we always live to bless his name. Amen.