

He was always the guest...
Sermon on John 2: 1-11

He was always the guest.

In the homes of Peter and Jairus, Martha and Mary, Joanna and Susanna,
he was always the guest.

At the meal tables of the wealthy where he pleaded the case of the poor,
he was always the guest.

Upsetting polite company, befriending isolated people, welcoming the stranger,
he was always the guest...

Do you remember those sentences that we often say as the beginning of our
communion liturgy? Describing something very important about Jesus and his
life... Emphasising the fact that he often was a guest at the tables of all sorts of
people.

He was always the guest...

and so he was, in this story that I would like us to look at today.

Jesus was the guest – at a wedding.

This is one of the very early stories about Jesus' life and work in the gospel of
John. It is the very first miracle he does. Before this story of the wine at the
wedding there are highly philosophical explanations about the word becoming
flesh – because, just like the evangelist Mark, John does not have any tale about
Jesus' birth or any of the stories around Christmas. John starts with a
complicated introduction; he lets us meet John the Baptist and learn about his
relationship to Jesus, and then he lets Jesus call his first few disciples.

That's it.

That is all that happens before John comes to chapter 2 of his gospel, which
starts with this wedding in Cana of Galilee.

The wedding at Cana is a story we may all play a part in.

It is not only the story of a wedding. It is the story of any feast... it is the story of
life itself...

It is a story of good times and bad times, of farewells and new beginnings.

The feast is an image of our lives

The feast is an image of the kingdom of God.

A feast with wine, a lot of wine – symbol for the joy of life...

and with guests, friends who had come to celebrate for not only an hour or two,
but several days...

We meet a mother who's got to let go of a child and come to terms with the ways,
the changes and the distance of a grown-up son:

fare well and new beginning;

acceptance on the one hand, confidence and the chance of a new relationship on
the other...

... not only for Mary...

... not only for the mothers of brides and bridegrooms, but for all of us who live
with other people...

... for all who must learn to let go, to say goodbye, to wave off and to find answers to the eternal question:

„What concern is that to you and me?“

Properly translated from the Greek, Jesus simply asks: What between you and me?

Developing into: What is it between you and me?

What's happening between the two of us?

And even today: what concern is there between people? Do they... do we meet and communicate and share?

What is there between you and me?

Not a bad question to ask at the beginning of a new year.

Not a bad question to ask in a church with people coming from more than 20 different nations.

Have I got s.th. to do with you?

... and if so, what is it?

What connects us?

What separates us?

What might cut us off from one another?

This is not only a question between a mother – Mary – and her son – Jesus.

This is a question that asks all of us a lot about our lives.

About how we live, which ways we choose and what goal we are aiming at.

What is it all about? What for?

Are we walking alone, or are we accompanied by others, are we supported by a community, and are we supporting others?

What concern is that... to you and me?

The eternal question of all human relationships:

the question among strangers and friends, parents and children, husbands and wives.

And deep inside we all know that it is only together that we can succeed, it is only together that we can enjoy life and experience it to the full.

It is only together: together in love – made clear by the image of the wedding.

And then we look around and see those who we live with...

Yes, this concerns you and me!

I have got s.th. to do with you.

Life on this earth cannot be lived alone.

No man is an island.

The first miracle in the gospel of John is describing our lives – in the image of the feast – our lives as intended and wished by God.

...in the image of a wedding that again and again needs a miracle in order to carry on.

It needs guests.

And it needs an even greater guest. It needs somebody invited, who can bring more than we can bring, who can bring what is missing: wine, friends, joy ...

The first miracle in the gospel of John paints a picture of our life as we really may experience it:

good times and bad times,
times of joy and times of fear.

Times where in the midst of all our planning and doing, working, celebrating and journeying, suddenly we run out of the most essential things, we run out of wine.

But that's what happens in life. There is nothing special or dramatic about it. To run out of necessary supplies in the middle of everything is normal.

It happens so often...

As if it was a very ordinary everyday thing, John simply writes:

„When the wine gave out...“

When the wine gave out...

the wine of confidence,
the wine of attention or solidarity,
the wine of daily tenderness,
the wine of the ability to share,
the wine of hope and
the wine of imagining a life of justice and peace for all.

There are so many kinds of wine in people's lives; and they can run out of so many things...

It can be the others who are left without wine,
it can be me – without wine, without joy, without future...

And how can life still be a feast, or become a feast again, once we are stranded without resources?

When our jars are only filled with emptiness, boring routine and thoughtlessness? When all that we had once been dreaming of is reduced to organizing the bare bones of daily life... no emotions, no celebrations, no joy?

The wine can give out to such an extent...

that one cannot see a way to carry on,
that one desperately exploits even the smallest resources until there remains only exhaustion instead of fulfilment in life.

You struggle on day by day –

and you can be really glad when somebody comes along who knows; somebody who notices your struggle and sees your situation of need and despair.

„When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said...“

She noticed... She cared...

This cannot be taken for granted: the mothers, the fathers, the friend or even the stranger who comes along, understands the situation and finds words for the pain and the need.

It is a blessing when others are capable of realizing „They've run out of wine“, and manage to say so without doing harm or damage.

When we run out of wine in life, we might remember today's story:
the deep human story of giving and taking, of empty jars and greater guests...

It happens in every life. That is so human...
That's part of our relationships: the wine gave out.
And then Mary says: „Do whatever he tells you.“

Do whatever he tells you.

Listen to the voice of God that comes from outside yourselves, that can bring new ideas, possibilities which had been hidden but which can never run out.

Do what he tells you – don't stay occupied with your own self and your personal needs only, look ahead, see somebody or something new and discover the voice of God bringing a new tone into your life.

And do what you can do. Contribute with what you have and what you are.
The most simple thing on earth can sometimes seem so difficult and far off...
„Fill the jars with water“... if that is what you have.

But when you do so, don't do it half-way.

Fill the jars up to the brim with what you have, what has been left in your times of emptiness and exhaustion.

Fill the jars up to the brim –

with your tears maybe,

with your fears,

with your broken dreams and lost hopes,

with your worn-out vision of a new way of life,

with your anger,

your tiredness and your frustration.

Fill the empty jars with the deep desires that stayed alive somewhere inside you;
add your lamentations,

your wishes for a better world,

collect your memories and draw pictures of your future,

believe in your plans

even though they all seem to be in vain.

Turn to other people,

open yourselves,

make friends...

And sometimes: let them believe and carry through

what you can't,

let them help to fill the jars again,

make water into wine...

Do whatever you can up to the brim, do not hesitate or be ashamed...

and then wait...

Wait for the miracle... believe in God's wondrous appearance in your lives.

Life is not possible without miracles,

without these greater things to happen,

when we don't remain alone but come together,

when we can turn to one another, see others' needs and help with all we have.

Mary trusted in the power of Jesus –

and she passed this confidence on to the others; she knew about the right time even better than Jesus did:

And he – he turns water into wine abundantly; and gives it an even better taste. He improves the feast and their lives more than they could have ever dreamed of... from then on things tasted so much better than before!

It is the first miracle in the gospel of John:
a story of good times and bad times...
It is encouraging visions of transformation and enabling people to go on celebrating, because Jesus is celebrating with them.
This story is a beginning,
at the beginning of the gospel of John,
at the beginning of a new year
and hopefully over and over again at every new beginning in our lives.

The wine which brought back joy and light,
the wine which surprised people in the end turned out to be the better wine:
ripe and red and full of taste...
Six stone water jars... 600 litres, if you just try to imagine:
an incredible amount of joy for not only hours but weeks and months, and maybe a lifetime!
This abundant wealth was to be shared until everybody could taste it:
The fullness of life, the light of God and the power of Christ.
This abundant wealth is to be shared – even today:
until everybody has enough bread to eat, a place to live and a good job to do.
And because we do not live by bread alone – nor by houses and jobs:
we might also share what there is in our jars:
words of comfort, songs of courage,
the experience of forgiveness and the vision of God's kingdom on this earth.

The wedding at Cana is most certainly a story we all play a part in.
Whoever we are.
However we feel and live...
You may identify yourself with all the roles in John's wondrous story of the wedding:
Be Mary, or Jesus...
Feel free to see yourself as one of the disciples, as a nameless guest, a servant, the steward, the bridegroom or the bride who - as you may notice - is not even mentioned in the narration.
We could be any of them or all of them at various times in life...
those who need
those who see the need
those who make the plan
and those who put it into reality
those who give
and those who receive the gift
and celebrate their lives from now on.

All of us here this morning are celebrating our lives together, playing one or another part...
All of us need to take and to give, to let go and start anew,

to live and carry on in good times and bad
celebrating our lives in the presence of Jesus.

Please take this story into the days to come:
share water, if that is what you have,
drink wine,
be who you are, not more and not less,
dance at weddings & expect miracles.
Amen.

Prayer

Loving God,
turn the water of our lives
into your costly wine.
And use us all
for the good of the world.
Amen.