

## **Not just a party trick<sup>i</sup>**

*He was thirty when it happened.*

*There was no warning – he had never done that kind of thing before, though we had been at plenty of weddings. But this was a really big wedding. It was Isaac Morgenthaler's daughter who was marrying a boy from the city and everyone in our village was invited.*

*So I say to him, "Listen, Jesus, there's going to be a lot of nice girls at this affair. You're thirty and you're not getting any younger. So don't be backwards at coming forward just because your old mother's there – if you know what I mean. I won't be watching you."*

*Well he just rolled his eyes the way his father used to so I said no more. At any rate, we got to the wedding and into the reception and what a spread...! There was breaded octopus, roast quail in pomegranate sauce, pickled locusts (not my favorite but they are a delicacy)... and mushroom omelet's for the vegetarians. Everything was magnificent, especially the olives and the cheese – a little salty perhaps but tasty for sure.*

*Between that and the heat – more than 30C I'd say – there was a lot of drinking going on.*

*We must have been sitting at the table for over two hours; everyone was talking at the top of their voice. And then I noticed it got distinctly quieter – maudlin even. So I turned to our Jesus and I say, "I think that's the wine run out."*

*He just turned to me, rolled his eyes and said, "Very observant mom – I can see you know!"*

*They way he said it I knew he was up to something though so I watched and I waited. When I saw him get up from the table and move toward the kitchen I said to one of the waiter, "You see that fellow walking into the kitchen, that's my boy. You need to follow him and do what he tells you."*

*Well, exactly what happened after that I don't really know – there are dozens of different stories. According to Jesus, he just asked for the big water jars to be filled from the well. Then he lifted them one at a time, gave them to the waiters and told them to take them to the tables.*

*Simple and straightforward but as it turned out in no time at all the noise level was higher than ever and everyone was congratulating Mr. Morgenthaler on the Beaujolais nouveau!*

*As Jesus returned to his seat beside me I leaned over and asked, "How come with all the water jars in my kitchen you've never turned your hand to wine making before?"*

*He didn't answer of course – just rolled his eyes the way his father used to do – like I should have known what was what.*

*That's all in the past of course and the idea of turning water into wine has become something of a cliché I suppose – a magic act or party trick – just another showy miracle. But it distracted us a bit from the wedding – from the people at the threshold of a new covenant.*

*Many of the prophets talk about weddings – use the imagery to tell us what it will be like when the Messiah comes – if he comes. They use all the language of marriage, bride and bridegroom – they describe the banquet laid on by God – all the finest food. I guess it's to help us understand just how much God love us – how committed God is to us.*

*I remember that Isaiah says that the people will be joined to God just like a bride and groom – just like Morgenthaler's daughter and that fine boy from the city. He says that God rejoices just like those newlyweds rejoice and that God delights in the marriage – the new relationship of promise.*

*In the Psalms there are also messages of feasting and how we all depend on God for shelter, abundant food, a river of drink – like what we enjoyed at that Cana wedding!*

*So when Jesus did what he did that day, my mind ran to Isaiah and to the Psalms and I knew that it was much more than just a party trick. I knew it had something to do with the fulfillment of God's plan – with a new covenant – with God's abundant grace.*

*I think the whole experience was a message about a greater problem that Jesus had been noticing but not saying too much about. He wasn't surprised that we'd run out of wine – it was like a kind of parallel to our lives – spiritless and empty. Here we were – celebrating and worshiping but something wasn't quite right.*

*When the wine jugs were empty that day – Jesus rolled his eyes knowingly – he had already seen that our spirit had given out. Think about your own situation for a moment and you'll see what I mean...*

*Maybe you're out of wine too – out of spirit – used up. It can happen with school or in a job – in a relationship or when you struggle with health problems and finances. Have you ever felt like your life was a desert – a desolate wilderness – no water, no wine – no spirit? Have you ever lost sight of God – forgotten the promise of grace and needed a miracle to assure you that God cared? That's how I think Jesus saw us at that wedding banquet – how we felt sometimes too but we didn't know what to do about the problem of no wine so we grew quiet and our spirits sagged just like yours do sometimes.*

*When he filled those empty water jugs it was like he poured some of himself into them – living water that became our new spirit. What was empty became full! And my Jesus is not one to do things by halves so those jars weren't just full – they were brimming! It's more of a miracle that they didn't spill over – but that would have been a rotten shame since the wine was top of the line – a deluxe vintage if ever there was one.*

*Jesus didn't just want us to have lots more wine – plenty of spirit – he wanted us to have the very best.*

*I've thought about that wedding day often over the years and wondered about the message of that quality wine that flowed so freely after Jesus got involved. There is a deeper meaning to it all I'm sure.*

*Jesus went on to teach that our lives in relationship with God can be so full that they spill over – brimming just like those jugs filled with water that became wine. He showed how we can be filled with something new and marvelous. He was never stingy or cautious or measured and all of that showed in how he handled the wine situation at that Cana wedding. I wonder if the Morgenthaler's or the villagers knew what was going on in their midst?*

*Now – from this new point of view – I see so clearly that he offered much more than wine that day – more than spirit – he showed how he would offer himself. He gave it his all – his whole being – just like he gave all he had with the wine. Nothing cheap about Jesus – he was special – the best – Beaujolais nouveau – and lots of it!*

*He was thirty when it happened.*

*There was no warning – he had never done that kind of thing before. Maybe I should have been paying better attention – hindsight you know, it's 20/20. It was a miracle, no doubt – a special event on a special day – a message that I missed until I heard it again and again throughout his ministry – at the cross – in the resurrection.*

*He knew then what we learned later – that for those whose spirit had failed – who had no spirit (no wine) – for those relationships with God that were barren and dry – Jesus would make a difference. He offered brimming vats of wine full of exquisite flavor – no one would ever be parched in his presence. He offered renewed spirit and abundance.*

*That's all in the past now and the idea of turning water into wine, well it seems to some like just another party trick or overworked cliché – but it is so much more than that because it is not just a miracle about the water and the wine – it is about us, standing at the threshold of a new covenant – our emptiness filled and transformed in Jesus.*

This Sermon Copy reflects the style of the spoken word rather than the written word. Allowances should be made for grammatical style and sentence structure that are characteristic of the spoken word. The Rev. L. T. Kavanagh, 2010

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<sup>i</sup> The first section is an adaptation of *The Wedding, Present on Earth*, Iona Community Resource, 2002.