

1 Corinthians 12.1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

John 2.1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 9 When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." 11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

I wonder if you can think of a time when you had an experience that was just so much better than you expected?

Jesus turning the water into wine at this wedding in Cana, this event in the Gospel of John that is described as being Jesus' first miracle, is a quiet act of generosity that exceeds all expectations.

Now, at the time, the cultural norm was for wedding feasts to carry on for days, and they would have included many people - probably whole villages would have gathered to celebrate together. The wine would have been flowing, there would have been music and dancing, it would have been a huge, vibrant party, until the unthinkable happened...

The wine ran out.

For the host, this would have been quite an embarrassment. It would be like us inviting people to a church lunch, but there being no food left when they arrived.

But instead of the party dwindling out, and grumpy guests going home early, here we see a glimpse of the abundant generosity of God in Jesus' actions.

As I was re-reading this story, I wondered how many bottles of wine it would have been equivalent to - it says that there were 6 stone jars, holding 20-30 gallons of water each. So, at least 120 gallons. And 1 gallon of wine is equivalent to just over 5 bottles. So the amount of wine Jesus produces is somewhere between 6 and 9 hundred bottles. That's quite a lot of wine.... The party is definitely saved in style!

And not only is there enough for everyone at the wedding to party on for days to come, but it is the best wine they have tasted! The chief steward, who doesn't know where this unexpected wine has come from, is baffled, because why would you serve the best wine to people who are already a bit merry, and won't be able to tell the difference?

I quite like that Jesus' first public miracle is so lavish that it almost seems ridiculous. It sets the scene for his ministry, in which Jesus constantly does the unexpected, constantly surprises and baffles and doesn't play by the rules. He's always generous to people when we might not think they deserve it, and in fact, isn't this at the heart of what Jesus is all about?

There's one more thing about this story, that I wonder if you noticed - one more thing that became characteristic of Jesus' ministry.

It is that the 'important' people, those with authority and status, aren't part of the miracle. The only people who actually know what happens, who see Jesus in action and witness the beginning of his public ministry, are the servants. The ones who are outside of the party, doing the running and fetching and carrying - it is they who are privileged to witness it. It is they who know where this fine wine has come from.

Does that sound familiar? Something about the least being the greatest, and the greatest being the least?

The bridegroom gets to drink good wine and avoid embarrassment, but it is the servants who have seen God in action, and who have taken part in the miracle themselves.

Perhaps that is something to take comfort in, when life around us seems quite chaotic, especially at the moment with all the political confusion. And when the world is so clearly divided into those who have - the infamous 1% - and those who have not (the many who go without their basic needs being met); it is always

those who are usually overlooked, or disregarded, who Jesus welcomes into his ministry, and into the Kingdom of God.

So, instead of becoming a disaster, this wedding becomes an abundant example of God's desire to lavish his love on everyone. It is a glimpse of a divine generosity, that goes beyond what we might think is necessary or even sensible. It's unexpected. It's a joyous, wholehearted willingness to celebrate.

I wonder how many of the people at the wedding ever noticed anything happening at all? Perhaps the chief steward and the bridegroom thought the servants had just found some extra wine tucked away in the cellar.

Did they miss out on knowing the wonder of Jesus because they were too comfortable, too content with being brought their food and drink, without a thought as to where it had come from?

And it is worth asking ourselves - do we ever become complacent with the blessings in our lives? Do we miss out on the wonder of seeing God's abundant blessings because we take things for granted?

I wonder what real abundance would look like for you. Do you know if you have it? Have you ever looked for it?

I'm pretty sure abundance isn't when those who have good things keep it all to themselves, because abundance is never an individual thing. It's never just you or me surrounded by piles of goodness, shut away from everyone else in case someone pinches a bit, because abundance has to be shared, otherwise it is empty. Abundance is about relationship, with others and with God. It's about celebrating the gifts in life. It's about seeing Jesus among us, in each other. And the fact that God is within each one of us, is perhaps the greatest gift of abundance of all!

The first reading we heard this morning, from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, talked about people having different gifts. And there was one line that I think is really important - Paul says, 'there are varieties of gifts, but the same spirit'. And so when we think about ourselves, and about each other, we are of course good at different things. We have different skills, different preferences, we like and dislike different things, we are good, or not so good, at doing different things. But we all have the Spirit of God. And it is in the

middle of all that being different from each other, that we find abundance. We are blessed with each other. We are surrounded by an abundance of the family of God.

And, although it's not one of our readings for today, another verse that came to my mind when I was thinking about abundance is a verse from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It says something like, "through the Holy Spirit at work within us, God is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3v20-21).

We are surrounded by wonder. Hundreds of bottles of the finest wine is a small comparison to the glory of having the Spirit within us, blessing us with gifts, more than we could ever expect.

So let's be willing to take time to celebrate, to look for, and rejoice in, the abundance of blessings we have from God.

What is the abundance in your life? Where can you see the Holy Spirit, and the lavish, almost ridiculously over-the-top love of God?

And in the moments when life is hard, and abundance seems far away, remember that it wasn't those who seemed to have it easy, who got to see Jesus' first miracle, but it was the servants, the least, who were asked to take part in his generosity, a generosity beyond what they could have imagined.

Amen.