

Sermon by Venerable Susanna Pain  
17/1/10

John 2:1-11

*The Rabbi says: I stand under a chuppah (wedding canopy) with a couple. In our tradition, this four poled canopy with open sides and a covered roof is called a Kikdah Me'at – a small sanctuary. The space underneath it is set aside as sacred – and found within its confines are the two partners in the marriage, God ... and me! (talk about being a 4<sup>th</sup> wheel.) From there, I just do my best to remind them (as if I need to at that moment) of this fact: that **on this day, and every day, they and God work together to create sacred space.***

*The rest of the ceremony and the Jewish wedding rituals are all about this simple idea; that the very essence of relationships is sacred, holy, and it has the potential to profoundly affect not only each other and their family (if children are in their future), but the entire world.*

*Seasons of the Spirit*

Nikolai and I were married at St James Church, King Street in Sydney just over 8 years ago!

It was a wonderful occasion – some people in the parish had arranged the flowers so they looked like a spring garden. The choir sang like angels. The organist played in his usual flamboyant style. My InterPlay friends danced with a long length of silk, which they had painted on ... lowering it from the balcony, dancing it down the aisle and passing it over us three times, creating a sacred space.

And my friend Jane Foulcher preached. The gospel we chose for the day was the same as the one you heard this morning – the wedding at Cana.

Jane spoke of the losses Nikolai and I had both suffered in recent years, and she spoke of joy and celebration and the overflowing extravagant generosity of God - found in the story and in our lives ... along side our pain and loss.

That extravagant generosity is what I want to focus on and celebrate today but first let's take a closer look at the biblical story.

The wedding takes place 3 days after Philip is called to be a disciple, in the small village of Cana, about 12 kms north of Nazareth, where Jesus grew up.

The whole village was probably there including Jesus and his mates, and his family. No doubt it had been going on for days ... eating, drinking dancing celebrating ... when the grog ran out!

Mary, Jesus' mother, a compassionate woman – noticed – and said to Jesus  
Psst – they have no wine!

Jesus, relaxing and enjoying himself said 'so what? that's not our problem! leave me alone, it's not my time yet..'

But Mary, as mothers are want to do, ignored his objections. She believed in him.  
She said to the servants. 'diakanas' in Greek the deacons/ministers (lots of symbolism in John)

'Do what he tells you'

(Notice, it is a woman, Mary who prompts this final sign – and it is Mary Magdalene who is the first disciple after the resurrection but that's another story)

'Do what he tells you' she says to the servants. Now standing there were six stone water jars each holding 20 or 30 gallons – what's that in litres? Heaps and heaps!

‘Fill the jars with water’ Jesus said. They filled them to overflowing.

Now draw some out and take it to the M/C – they must have wondered, smirking behind their hands.

The M/C smelled it sipped it and pronounced – this is fantastic! Vintage Grange. Why did you keep the best wine til last?

He challenges the groom quizzically: (There’s more here than meets the eye) the groomsman just shrugs!

This is the first of Jesus’ signs says the Gospel writer – the first half of John’s gospel is full of such signs – 7 in all – signs which point to God’s presence in Jesus.. signs which elicit faith, and belief in Jesus disciples.

The story ends ‘and his disciples believed in him.’ So there you go.

The disciples believed in him. They had faith in the presence of God, in this man Jesus – wow!!

1. The story tells us something about Jesus – he was there, in the community, celebrating with them, and he enabled the party .... When we are close to God, when we know we are deeply loved, we are free to celebrate, to let go, to *be*, to be with ...
2. The story also tells us about God’s generosity – and our freedom to be wastefully generous also. Put this story alongside the reading from 1 Corinthians and we have more to chew on.

Paul in Corinthians speaks of the wonderful gifts of God’s spirit, given for the building up of the community – gifts of wisdom, faith, knowledge, healing ecstatic utterances, prophecy, inspired preaching, discernment. These gifts are freely and generously given. Whether they are God given depends on whether they contribute to the common good and edify community.

I wonder what gifts are present in this community?

What do you notice?

Can you name your own gifts and  
the gifts of those around you?

What gifts are manifest here?

I invite you to stand if this applies to you:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Morning tea          | <input type="checkbox"/> Flowers  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sidespeople          | <input type="checkbox"/> Musicians  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ministry of the word | <input type="checkbox"/> Cup bearers  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bulletin             | <input type="checkbox"/> Visit Calvary  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intercessions        | <input type="checkbox"/> Pastoral partners  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cleaning roster      | <input type="checkbox"/> Do repairs   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Readers              | <input type="checkbox"/> Those who volunteer at organisations who<br>express compassion or do justice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Admin                | <input type="checkbox"/> Prayer vine  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children’s church    | <input type="checkbox"/> Casserole  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening            | <input type="checkbox"/> Work with committees   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Youth group          | <input type="checkbox"/> Offer worship to God   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pastoral care        |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outreach             |   |

God is the gracious Hostess  
who offers us the very best  
and gives abundantly  
so not only can we count our blessings  
but we can share them with all.

We are a community gifted and giving.  
Let us encourage one another and leave this place  
singing and dancing and speaking of God's extravagance in the world. *Seasons of the Spirit*

Reflect on the gifts you contribute to this community then if you are willing, spend some time with the person nearby, encouraging each other.

Several evenings ago I was walking in North Parramatta. I walked past a woman about to get into her car and smiled. She responded – what a beautiful smile! It cost me nothing to smile at her – a gift freely given, but her acknowledgement and affirmation really touched me.