

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

The relationship shared in a marriage is the most intimate of human relationships. It is not surprising that we find the marriage relationship used in the Scriptures as an image of God's relationship with his people. The people of Israel were often unfaithful to God. God allowed them to chase after other partners. But today's reading from the Prophet Isaiah captures a moment when God renews his marriage vows with Israel.

We should not be surprised to find that in the Gospel of John Jesus begins his ministry at a wedding. Because we are reading John's gospel, we can expect that he has carefully crafted his story and that he will be inviting us to look beneath the words that he is using. We might notice first the order in which people are mentioned at the beginning of the passage. That the mother of Jesus is named before her son, alerts us to the possibility that she will have a big part in this story. You might notice that she is never called by name.

Mary is the one who notices that they had run out of wine, and she alerts Jesus to that fact. The response of Jesus can only be seen as a rebuke to his mother. "Woman, why turn to me? My hour has not yet come." How do we interpret that? It seems that Jesus doesn't care that they have run out of wine. But there is something deeper here. Jesus is saying to his mother that

there is a bigger picture here that she is no longer part of. Jesus can no longer be directed by his mother on earth, but by his Father in heaven. Jesus begins to talk about his hour, a theme that is very strong in John's gospel. His hour had not yet come to reveal his glory as God. Jesus would only be able to say that his hour had come when he was about to face his passion and death. It is then that Mary is again called "woman" by Jesus as she stands with him at the foot of his cross. Mary is not mentioned again in John's gospel until then.

What is crucial in today's gospel is what Mary does next. Despite the rebuke that she has received from her son she simply says to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you." Everything else that happens in the gospel follows from that. Jesus tells the servants to fill the jars with water. They do exactly what he tells them. He then tells them to draw some of that water and take it to the steward. They obey his word without question. When the steward tasted what they had brought to him, he discovered that the water had been turned into the best wine that he had tasted.

From outside of that intimate union that Jesus now shares with his Father Mary acts as someone who trusts completely in whatever the word of Jesus might bring. From outside of that bigger picture that will determine the hour of Jesus, Mary trusts in the word that Jesus will

speak, not knowing what that word might be. Mary is the perfect example of a disciple of Jesus. She shows us how to trust in him. She directs us to respond to his word by doing whatever he tells us. If we take anything from today's gospel this is what we should hold on to. So often we are called to trust in Jesus' love for us when we do not know the bigger picture that moves him to act on our behalf. So often we are called to do what he tells us to do before we can understand why.

There are other things that we can draw from today's gospel. Jesus turned a lot of water into wine, much more than was needed. It is an expression of the super abundance of his care for us, his prodigal, wasteful love for us. That there were six stone water jars there, one less than the perfect number, might suggest to us that Jesus was replacing something that was good by something that was perfect. Those jars held the water used for the purification rites of the old law. He was ushering in the new law of love that would be sealed with his blood. The bridegroom in this story doesn't do anything. But in the eyes of the steward, he is the one who is responsible for keeping the best wine till last. The next time we will hear of a bridegroom in John's gospel it will be on the lips of John the Baptist who calls himself the friend of the bridegroom. Even in today's gospel we understand that Jesus is the bridegroom who

is responsible for the new wine. We the Church are the bride that he loves.

If we have learnt from today's gospel that trust and obedience are at the heart of being a disciple of Jesus, then we can look to St Paul to see how we might exercise our discipleship. Paul tells us that there are a whole variety of gifts that God gives to us. These gifts of God's Spirit are given to us to be used in the service of others. He wants us to understand that we are meant to work together as God's family, supporting each other and complementing each other as we use these gifts. "All these are works of the one and the same Spirit who distributes different gifts to different people just as he chooses."

It is often difficult for us to recognise the gifts that we have been given. But perhaps we will recognise and generously use our gifts if we keep looking for the gifts that others have and encourage their use. That means that we have to take time to get to know people and hear their stories. Our parish is full of people who are waiting for us to get to know them. What are we going to do about that this week?