

Sunday 20th January 2019
Epiphany 3 (C)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Isaiah 62.1-5

NT: I Corinthians 12.1-11

G: John 2 1-11

“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.”

According to the Lidl Website (other wine merchants are available) The 2015 St Emilion Grand Cru, has a score of 89 Very Good on their 100-point rating system and for £10.99 would be an excellent match to accompany a Beef Wellington.

I don't know if Filet de bœuf en crouete, was a favourite of Thomas Jefferson's but history does tell us that included within his collection of some 680 bottles of wine, when he returned to the USA from his ambassadorial posting to Paris, was a bottle of Chateau Margaux 1787. The very bottle which the wine merchant, William Solokin, brought to the Four-Season Hotel New York for a Margaux dinner only for it to be dropped by the wine waiter, a costly slip for the insurance company as it paid out \$225,000.

Although that is not the most expensive red wine ever produced that title belongs to a surprisingly young New World wine, a six-litre bottle of Screaming Eagle Cabernet 1992 from the Napa Valley was sold at auction in 2000 for \$500,000. At that price I doubt that anybody would get to taste it, but if they did apparently it has a rich, oak-aged aroma range laced with blackcurrant, liquorice, vanilla, boysenberry and smoky dark chocolate.

Whatever are your views on the best wine in the world and however generous you might be I am certain that none of us would save our Grand Cru to the end of the party when everyone had been drinking the dregs of the wine box for the last few hours. Yet that is exactly what John tells us that Jesus chose to do for his first recorded miracle?

John calls what happened as Cana 'the first of his signs'- and to understand anything of its significance we need to firstly understand what was happening; in a Jewish wedding which would have been (and still is) a major celebration.

After all the processions when they'd finally enter the groom's house, they'd eat tons of food and drink lots of wine – wine that usually had to be diluted with water, because traditional Jewish wedding celebrations didn't just last one evening like weddings do now – sometimes they could last a whole week! And in Jewish culture, it was the groom who was responsible for making sure that there was enough food and wine for everyone – and he paid for everything out of his own pocket, including paying off the bride's father!

So back to John's account – because he gives us some important information: he tells us that 'Jesus' mother was there; and that Jesus and his disciples had also been invited.'

Cana was a small village in the mountains of Galilee about 8 miles north of Nazareth, and a lot of people in that area were either related to each other or would have known each other, so it's highly likely that Jesus knew the bridal couple.

"when the wine was gone, Mary said to Jesus, 'they have no more wine.'" This was a real problem, not just a minor inconvenience, because under Jewish law, each family was socially and legally obliged to provide a feast of food and wine that met the social standards of the community. And to run out of wine halfway through the wedding party would have made you the laughingstock of the community, ostracized and marked down for the future. And now when Mary said to Jesus, "They have no more wine," she was genuinely concerned about the welfare of this young couple and she was hoping that he could do something to help.

Standing there were six stone water-jars, holding between 20 or 30 gallons each, it is important to understand that you really aren't supposed to drink water from those jars! Those were the ones which were generally set aside for ceremonial cleansing. Jesus instructed the disciples to fill those jars with water, they were probably nudging each other in utter disbelief. And then when Jesus said, "Now go and give some to the steward, they'd have been

incredulous "Do whatever he tells you, Mary said – however bizarre – and this most certainly was!" you could imagine that their hearts were pounding in their chest when they took that water to the steward.

And we're told he put the cup to his lips and tasted... vintage wine – nectar! So, not surprisingly he called out to the bridegroom and said, "Could you come over here for a minute?" "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink, but you have saved the best 'til now! This wine is incredible!"

Are you getting a sense of something incredible happening here?

Well for one thing, no one really knows how it all happened. As far as we know, Jesus never waved his arm over the water pots. He never said, "I command this water to become wine!" He simply willed it to happen, and it happened. And isn't this the way Jesus still does his miraculous work today? – no hype, no fuss – he often acts in such a sublimely, low key, respectful way that many of us aren't even aware that something supernatural might be going on – even when it is!

And a final thing I want us to notice about Jesus' first miracle is the sheer quantity of the wine. Jesus made anywhere from 120 to 180 gallons of wine. Almost 600 bottles of wine, the same quantity as Thomas Jefferson's Wine collection.

Why? – because God is an extravagant, lavish giver of good gifts! The abundance of the wine is a symbol of God's love and grace. There's always enough for everyone and there's always some left over. You see the same thing when Jesus feeds 5000 people in John chapter 6. Remember all the baskets of bread and fish left over? Jesus gives us everything we need – and more!

And the quality?! This wasn't the cheap plonk,- this was the choicest Premier Cru - first growth claret or burgundy. A 1787 Margaux or the 92 Screaming Eagle Cabernet and God saved the best for last!

The point is that those of us who invite Jesus into their situation find him saving the best things in life for last!

We get this picture of the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven!

Just one last thing: why the mention of the ceremonial jars? Well Jesus is sending a message right from the word go that he's going to transform all the stuffy and restricted practices of Pharasaic Judaism that entrap people in feeling guilty - into the new wine of the Kingdom.

So this isn't about doing church and being religious – it's about the breaking in of something utterly and completely – outrageously new!

Note the end of the reading. Jesus did this, the first of his signs in Cana of Galilee, and? revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him – put their trust in him. It changed their lives. This was all about the exuberant, creative power of God at work in bringing uncomplicated human enjoyment to a wedding – and through the rest of their time with Jesus they had to learn so many things about God's power at work – and not all of them palatable or easy to accept. But this streak of anarchic joy is so much like God as we encounter him in Jesus – God works in a rich variety of ways and doesn't always follow the rules!

The challenge for us of Epiphany is to invite Jesus into our situations – our lives – as Lord and Master – to show us what God's like – and then to do whatever he tells us – look what can happen...?!

Fr Bill Addy