

This morning we've heard a fraction of Peter and Joan's story. They know that many couples would like to have reached 50 years together but didn't. So there's much to be grateful for.

As I thought about today, my question was, what difference does Jesus make to a marriage? In Matthew and Mark he affirms the creation intent, **For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.'**

Marriage involves leaving, being united and becoming one – a decision to leave past priorities and commitments behind; a decision to unite and a journey to become one. Confession time: while I was waiting to have a haircut this week (shave really), I wanted to read the paper but it was busy and someone else had commandeered it. I was reduced to thumbing my way through a magazine. The story I read was about Jennifer Anniston and her latest husband Justin Theroux. She lives and works in LA; he's not willing to give up his bachelor pad in New York. Hence the 'marriage' is on the rocks; both have trouble leaving, I suspect.

For today, I want briefly to consider the difference Jesus makes through the lens of John's wedding story in Cana. What difference did Jesus make when he attended this wedding; what difference does Jesus make today?

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, 2 and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.'

4 'Woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My hour has not yet come.'

5 His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

6 Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from eighty to a hundred and twenty litres.

7 Jesus said to the servants 'Fill the jars with water'; so they filled them to the brim.

8 Then he told them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.'

They did so, 9 and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside 10 and said, '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 till now.'

There's so much we don't know about this:

We don't know who the couple were

We don't know what Mary's involvement was, although the clue is that she had some involvement in making sure it went well

We don't know why Jesus was there and how many of his friends were there.

But if it was a typical wedding in that part of the world at that particular time then there are some things we do know.

- That it was a community occasion and it took place on a Wednesday

- That a wedding lasted for days - the ceremony took place in the evening after a feast; then the young couple were conducted, in the dark to their new home so everyone could greet them on the way.
- That the couple didn't go away for a honeymoon; they stayed and held open home for a week!
- That Mary was there and Jesus and friends were there. Bible scholars assume that Joseph was dead by then.

A problem emerged – wine had run out. Wine at that time didn't pack the powerful punch it does these days and it was watered down too – drunkenness was a disgrace; but not as greater disgrace as running out of wine - the host was judged on how well he provided for his guests and at this point he's a dismal failure.

I'd rather not go into the exchange between Mary and Jesus today; there are several ways of interpreting what was being said by Jesus and Mary.

What interests me most today are the four things Jesus did at this wedding:

I He rescued the bridegroom; they'd run out of wine and it wasn't a good scene – imagine McDonald's running out of beef or KFC chicken or dare I say it, Cadbury's chocolate (wait that's going to happen isn't it?) It wouldn't look good and neither did it here.

II He provided the best - John puts it like this, **'the master of the banquet....called the bridegroom aside and said, '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 till now.'**

III He provided more than enough – this was a lot of wine, more than enough for all to be satisfied. But this isn't about amount, this is a statement that when the grace of Jesus comes to us there is enough, more than enough for all and some to spare

IV He lifted the experience of the people present to a new level – some people give the impression that to be a Christian, to be known as a Christian is to shed gloom wherever they go. Some believers are suspicious of all joy and happiness; to them religion is a thing of dark clothes, lowered voices and sitting staring at the necks of those in front of you. Charles Spurgeon once wrote in his lecture to students, **'I commend cheerfulness to all who would win souls; not levity and frothiness but a genial happy spirit. There are more flies caught with honey than vinegar.'**

And in celebrating with Joan and Peter their 50th wedding anniversary they would probably give testimony to all these:

That Jesus has rescued them, walked with them, through the tough times; through the dark times through the times when they wondered how they would ever get through.

That Jesus has provided them with the best - life, hope, joy and all the gifts that he brings

That Jesus has supplied their needs and beyond

That Jesus has lifts them to new levels in their relationship with God and with one another and with others.

And as Robert Browning wrote to the love of his life, /Elizabeth Barret Browning

Grow old along with me; the best is yet to be – that's been your privilege, may God go with you.