

Water into Wine

21 January 2024, Baptism Service

Reading: John 2.1-11

Preacher: Beth Keith

I wonder when you last felt daunted by the task ahead of you. Something needs doing, a problem needs solving, but you're not ready for it.

The very first time I came to Sheffield, some years ago, I had recently passed my driving test, and I was driving my sister to back to Uni. The drive had gone well, until we reached the University roundabout. It was, without doubt, the largest and busiest roundabout I had driven over by quite some way. You can probably imagine, the level of anxiety in the car rose, clear instructions were given about which lane to get in. And as we inched forward in our lane, words of encouragement...

"It'll be ok, you're in the right lane, just wait for a break in the traffic and you're just going straight over, stay in your lane, you'll be fine."

We got to the front of our que and sat waiting at the roundabout for a break in the traffic. But the breaks in the traffic were occasional, and not really breaks at all, more like gasps in the traffic. So, I missed a few opportunities.

The drivers behind me were getting annoyed now. And the encouraging words in the car had turned into stern directions, and then shouts.

"When you see a gap in the traffic just put your foot down, hope for the best".

I did and we survived, just.

I can remember feeling particularly ill equipped at various points when our children were small. Parenting can feel like a series of problems you're not quite ready for. And as soon as you master on thing, another task or development requires a new approach. Sometimes advice from books or friends helps. But somethings are only learnt by doing them yourself.

And as children grow up, the parent's role is not just to problem solve themselves but to help the child to. Teaching a child to go from stabilizers to riding a bike properly. Encouraging a child to believe in themselves, to have confidence in their abilities. To help them to make their own choices, and to know when to stand-back to let them make their own mistakes.

Today, we read a well-known story from John's gospel. It's remembered as the first miracle Jesus performed. It's the story read at church wedding ceremonies and often used to make that point that Jesus must have liked a good party.

When the Gospel books were put together, they were compiled from various verbal accounts, which were pulled together and edited to make sense of Jesus life and death to his followers. Like any story of a good night out, I can image the retelling of what happened grew in magnitude with each retelling, until it was written down.

But, for a story like this, we can assume that the writers edited this story in such a way, not just to convey events, but also to convey meaning. What might it mean that Jesus' first recorded miracle was turning vast quantities of water into wine. We could wonder whether the writer is pointing us toward God's generosity.

But when I read it through this week, I began to wonder why we are given this short conversation between Jesus and his mother?

There's a problem, they're at a wedding and the wine is running out. Mary seeing the problem approaches Jesus. I think I'm tempted to side with Jesus here – what has it got to do with them. They're not the hosts, it's really not on them to sort it out.

He's not ready, he doesn't want to do it, but she seems to land him in it. If there's a scale of parenting from encouraging words, through to just get on with it challenge, we're definitely at the just get on with it end of things.

What we don't know from the Gospels, is how parenting has gone for the last 20 plus years. How nurture and care has been balanced with challenge and discipline. How Mary has helped Jesus to grow up into who he has become.

The Gospel's were written to help nurture, develop, and challenge those early communities following Jesus. The stories were brought together to help to tell the story of their faith, and to pass on meaning to the next generation.

Perhaps, this story points to more than the physical elements of water and wine. Perhaps this story shows us how important other people are in nurturing not just our faith, but who we are. That we don't practice our faith in isolation but are encouraged to grow and challenged to step out and try new things, by those around us.

When those early faith communities gathered to talk about Jesus, they engaged with the stories in discussion. Storytelling inspired their imaginations, and dialogue enabled an environment where faith was passed on. Not like memory verse tests to be passed or failed, but as practices to be lived. Just as the Gospels were so important to those early faith communities so they can help us to in our own walk of faith.

For our Lent Course this year, we have decided to look at nourishing ways to read the Bible. The seminar and groups provide the opportunity for study and fellowship. A chance to get to know other people. And the opportunity to discuss how our scriptures can be life giving, whilst also to acknowledge ways in which they can be tricky and hard to read. We'll learn about different ways Christians have read the bible, and engaged in discussion and dialogue about meaning and faith.

Can I encourage you to sign up to the introductory seminar happening in a couple of weeks and to the Lent Groups which start mid-February. All the information is at the back of church in the notices and on the website.

I find it encouraging that Jesus needed to be encouraged and challenged. I find it encouraging to read this short conversation between him and his mother. That he needed a push and a nudge. That he needed those around him for encouragement and challenge, because, I know that I need that too. I need people around me who can at times offer encouraging words, but I also need people who say – "go on, you can do it, just get on with it."

I hope we can be that for each other.

And today as we celebrate with Jacob and Adam. We pray especially for them, and for their god parents. That they would feel nurtured and supported in their faith, and given the confidence and challenge to grow.