

***Life Transformed* – John 2: 1-11 1 Corinthians 12: 1-11**
Sermon for Sunday 16/01/22 by Rev Phil Wootton

For all the changes in society, weddings remain the ultimate in special events. Indeed, people can seem so obsessed with making it ‘their perfect day’ that it invites something to go wrong. In our Gospel story, something did go wrong. The wine ran out. This was the social faux pas to end all faux pas, a failure in hospitality, to be talked about for decades to come. The most special day was turning into disaster. Then everything changed, in the calm, simple instructions of Jesus: ‘Fill the water jars. Draw some out. Give it to the master of ceremonies.’ Problem solved. The best has been kept until last.

This new wine did not appear from nowhere or out of nothing. Jesus took what was already there, water, something so ordinary and every day that it wouldn’t even have got a mention – and transformed it into something new, fresh and vibrant. For us, washing our hands (or now hand-sanitizing) is ingrained as a way of life to prevent the passing on of germs. In those times, it was ritual washing that mattered, marking the separation between the world and the home, work and domesticity. Either way, this is something so normal and ordinary it didn’t deserve notice, but Jesus took the every day and turned it into a (social) life-saver. He took what belonged to the old world of laws and rituals, and turned it into the new Spirit-filled life of celebration. All he did was respectful of the past, rooted in all the ancient knowledge of God, but was never confined by the past. When he’s on the scene all sorts new possibilities open up. Transformation happens.

Paul’s instructions to the Christians in Corinth have a bearing on how we receive this message. The Corinthians had discovered this freshness in the Spirit, all sorts of new gifts and abilities were bursting out among them, but what they hadn’t got right is how to use them. Most of us, conscious of our failings, tend to write ourselves off as nothing special, or think what we do isn’t worth writing home about. But we know the opposite attitude as well, which is what the Corinthians suffered from. We can start thinking we’re better than others, we’re the only capable ones, or the only ones worth listening to. Neither way is right – which is obvious, when put in those terms.

The basic problem is that we start our thinking with ourselves in the middle. The answer is to begin with God in the middle of all our thoughts – to keep remembering all we have is gift from God – so no belittling of his gifts, nor boasting either. We are to use them, firstly, under his authority, and secondly, for the common good. And we need to recognise the whole range of gifts that God gives, different ones to different people. Think of them the same way, neither jealous of what others have and we don’t, nor disrespectful because we don’t really think what they can do is worth doing. Instead, value everyone. Take delight in them, as God does.

You may say, ‘I’m nothing special,’ but you are, to God. You may say, ‘I don’t do anything special,’ but if it’s what God wants you to do, then what could be more special? You may think that the tasks and responsibilities you have are all too ordinary to be worth talking

about, but God has entrusted them to you. So, whether it's as a job, or as a volunteer, whether looking after your home or your family, whether in church, whether through friendships and who you talk to, these are the ordinary activities God wants to make extraordinary. For, under his authority, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit, each one is special: only you can do it. God is in the business of turning water into wine.

At Christ Church, for quite some time, we had a slot in the 11.00 service called 'This Time Tomorrow.' Very simply, different members of the congregation were asked to share what they would be doing on a Monday morning – a way in to talk briefly about what every day life is for them. By talking about our 'ordinary' in church, we make it extraordinary, because we come to see it as part of God's plan and purpose for us. This short interview always ended with the question, 'How can we pray for you?' That question challenges us to think where we would like to be able to see God's presence in our daily lives. If, for example, you're going shopping on Monday morning, do you pray that you'll get a parking space, or that they won't have sold out of your favourite brand of baked beans? Or do you pray that you'll have a chance to help someone, to talk to someone, to put a smile on their face?

Well, I'm intending to restart 'This Time Tomorrow' this Sunday.

Jesus is in the business of transforming the ordinary to the extraordinary. Let's make sure we take our own 'ordinary' seriously enough that we may see the difference it makes when Jesus shares out his new wine.