

Sermon from 16th Jan 2020 by Rev. Sandy Clarke, Curate.

Something dreadful happened this week and it has caused me great sorrow and deep reflection.

I was having coffee with two friends. We sat smiling in the sunshine until someone mentioned the V word. One friend believes that we need to champion an individual's right to choice, while the other believes that vaccination is the only way out. I believe there are reasonable arguments on both sides of this question, but the disagreement itself was not the problem. It wasn't even relevant. The problem was that within 30 seconds my friends were no longer seeing another human being full of God's glory sat in front of them; they were seeing a monster. A monster.

And I sat there stunned, too stunned to stop them before someone said something really awful...

When I reflected on it yesterday morning, I realised, they had run out of wine, and if truth be told I was out as well or I would have turned to Christ in that moment.

This story of the wedding is typical of John. Within the telling of each significant instance of Jesus's life, John embeds the entirety of the gospel, and sometimes the entirety of the Bible story, for us to

unpick and apply in new and fresh ways each time they come up.

For those of you who have had too much indulgence over Christmas or struggle in their families with the difficulties alcohol can bring, this story is not really about wine, but please forgive me, we are going to stick with this metaphor.

There is a wedding where wine is essential and there is good wine. The wedding host runs out of wine. Jesus provides the unimaginably best wine.

good wine... no wine... best wine.

1000 years before the writing of John, the Israelites had good wine. King David sat on the throne, people were inheriting the land, Israel was becoming a force to be reckoned with. There was also betrayal and murder and from Solomon, idolatry and worldly extravagance. There was good wine; not the best.

As new kings emerged, people fell away from God, they were led into exile; They had run out of wine. And the people cried out to God as Mary cried out to Jesus, there is no more wine. Help us Lord, we have run out of wine.

And the Messiah came. God incarnate on earth as a baby, as a child, as a man preparing to begin his ministry, as an apocryphal prophet, as a martyr, as a servant king, God on a cross crucified and then resurrected for us, the best wine, a foretaste of the

kingdom where heaven meets earth, where tears are no more, something beyond our taste spectrum in this life.

We can map this cycle onto our nation's recent experience. We had good wine before the pandemic, we ran out sometime during last winter if not before and we are starting to see an indication of better wine, the full celebration, the joyous days when we can say with certainty that this is over in as much as it can be.

But each one of us are living in this cycle too. We can point to places where we have had good wine, where we have absolutely run out and where we have had a foretaste of heaven to come, God's kingdom on earth.

Where are you now?

Have you run out of wine?

In our advent course we have been exploring disagreement and forgiveness. We had this beautifully frank discussion about forgiveness on Wednesday afternoon that has stayed with me. Nigel Lewis said that our selection of media allows us to exist in an echo chamber where our own ideas become more and more crystalised and polarised, where we find it hard to relate to opposing ideas, where we find it hard to respect that other ideas even exist. The pandemic has heightened this situation,

until we can see monsters where only children of God exist, where Christ is actually present before us.

Mary asks Jesus for more wine and then tells the servants to do exactly what Jesus tells them to, exactly that. What is Jesus telling us to do? He gave us a new commandment, to love one another as I have loved you.

The point of this life is not in the issues that divide us, it is not in our opinions that we so staunchly defend, it is in the love we show each other, it is in our ability to stay in the room with people we disagree with and see Jesus in their face and love them. This is where the best wine lives, this is where the joy, the life, the truth reside, the place that Jesus longs to take each one of us as we give up the water that we so desperately cling to and allow him absolute authority to change it into wine.

Please forgive me if I make this sound simple, because it isn't. It's the hardest thing we are asked to do as Christians and it goes on and on. David Adams said on Weds, 'Forgiveness is slippery,' letting go of our grievances, our differences, our rights to holding opinions to our own glory, our desires to harbour self-righteousness, it is not sustainable without the power of our Lord.

Where do we begin? Right here as we invite Jesus to be among us,

Water into wine, wine into blood, blood into us. Let's enter the holy mystery with our hearts abandoned.