



**BENEDICTUS**  
contemplative church

18 January 2024

Epiphany 2 (John 2.1-11)

**Extravagant Grace**

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Anyone for a party? A wedding which goes on for days? Eating, drinking, dancing our fill. Anyone for extravagant generosity, overflowing bounty? Today we hear the first of Jesus' seven so called signs. This one, unique to John's gospel, happens at a Wedding in Cana on the third day.

Karoline Lewis comments that it presents an interesting contrast to next week's text from Luke. Both stories narrate the first acts of Jesus' public ministry, which provide important clues to who Jesus is for the respective author. For Matthew, why the Sermon on the Mount? For Mark, why an exorcism? We bring the same question to Luke and John. For Luke next week, why a return to his hometown? And for John, why water into wine?<sup>1</sup>

Remember John calls this a sign, not a miracle, though it is pretty miraculous! So, what is John trying to say, to show about who Jesus is and what he does? What deeper reality is Jesus revealing? What are we supposed to see about Jesus?

We hear of Jesus' mum, and in John's gospel we only hear about her here and at the foot of the cross. That's significant. She bookends his ministry in John's gospel. So here we have Mary, unnamed in this story, prodding Jesus to do his stuff, Mary who noticed the situation, Mary who acted, 'They have no more wine,' she said. What made her think he could do it? Has she seen something before?

The story is full of symbolism. We have six jars maybe reminiscent of the six days of creation, the jars that hold water for purification. That's the way things were done, water, purification. That's the old way. The purity laws were important, you had to do things the right way. Now the water in this story is turned into wine, a hint of resurrection? and not just one bottle but litres and litres and litres of wine three days into the wedding feast (does three ring a bell.. crucifixion to resurrection), and not only wine but, the best wine, from ordinary water. It is out of the ordinary, grace and glory come.

Of course there are layers to this story, always are, particularly with John. On one level it's about abundant generosity like the story of the father and the prodigal son, Jesus seems to be saying yes to life, yes to celebration, yes to relieving distress, and, of course, yes to his

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-john-21-11-4>

mum! On another level it's about the ordinary becoming a tool for transcendence, like the dirt and spit Jesus uses to open the eyes of a blind man.

Is that all that can be said about the story? Of course not. What do you take away from it? What does it tell you about Jesus, about his mother, 'Woman' he calls her, not mum. John is saying that Jesus is beyond the ordinary, that he can do stuff you and I can't. He is attesting to his deep relationship with God, Creator of the universe, who can do anything, it seems.

"My hour has not yet come." Jesus says to his mum. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus will refer to his "hour", the hour of his death, yet Jesus acquiesces here, and lives are changed.

Mary is at the beginning of his career and watches him die. She is the nurturing force in his growing. Perhaps it might help us to remember Jesus in a manger in the midst of miracles. Perhaps it is a reminder that whenever Jesus reveals his divinity, he is simultaneously revealing something about his humanity. Perhaps, in the sign that it is water into wine, we might even experience something that we need to know about ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

So here in the middle of January, in the Australian school holidays, many of us are relaxed, counting our blessings and receiving that abundance, even if it's just in little things, or, at least I am. Many from Benedictus are on retreat at Galong with Sarah in the spaciousness of retreat and meditation. Others of us are in the middle of SummerPlay, three days of Interplay, learning about ourselves, about each other and about Community, learning about gratitude and playfulness<sup>3</sup>. Retreat and play are not separate, they are two sides of the same coin of abundant life.

Transformation comes from within the ordinary, within the every day, within the rituals that we carry out to live our lives. If we are open, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear and mouth to taste we may find new wine in surprising places, even in 2025, living our lives, paying attention. Mary said, 'just do what he says', and something happened. Something changed. Not only for Mary but for everyone. But is that change a miracle, or a sign or both? It's already there if we have eyes to see it.

When Nikolai and I were in Yea last week walking through the streets I thought to myself, 'you have to look up if you want to see a koala', so I looked up, and there was a koala asleep way up high in the fork of the tree. It was there all along, but only when I looked up did I see it. a sign? Driving along a dirt road in the middle of the bush travelling to the Cascades, ahead on the road Nikolai and I saw an eagle. There was no roadkill, just a wedge-tail eagle. She opened her wings which seemed to span the width of the road and flew straight towards us, up and over our car. We were awestruck, especially Nikolai, who at 4am that morning had had a sense he would see a sign. He'd also read a poem, 'Cascade'. That was it for him..

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-john-21-11-4>

<sup>3</sup> [www.interplayaus.com.au](http://www.interplayaus.com.au)

Then, walking through the streets of North Fitzroy in Victoria a few days later, on Friday morning early, I looked up and there were seven hot air balloons passing by. Wonder, awe, mystery, refreshment, new life, exclamation marks in the sky, just there in front of me. I could've missed them. And the source of this new life for me is mystery, the Holy One, the Divine, who was and is and is to come.

But sometimes I have to have a holiday, in order to see, to open my heart a bit wider to listen to see to touch to taste.

Karoline Lewis suggests that Jesus' signs *show* us, don't tell us, what abundant grace is. And what does abundant grace taste like? Like the best wine when you are expecting the cheap stuff, like a Grange Hermitage, not chateau cardboard.. It's one thing to say, "Jesus is the source of grace." It's quite another to have an experience of it. <sup>4</sup>

It is the joy that stays with me in this reading, terrible embarrassment averted, enough, more than enough, grace upon grace.. and the possibility of change, and my emptiness being filled with new life. At the heart of this story is a vision of abundance. The wine that Jesus provides is not just enough to meet the need; it is overflowing, extravagant, and of surpassing quality. This is God's way: joy, generosity, and abundant life. The transformation at Cana is a sign of God's desire for us all, God's unconditional love for us, and it is gift. When things are at their lowest ebb, Divine life infuses the ordinary, and it sparkles, or shimmers, we get goose bumps, the hairs on our neck stand up.

The passage ends, "His disciples believed in him." It has begun, this transformation, this opening, this receiving of gift, of love, of generosity, as it has begun for us. The journey is now. The ordinariness of our lives are becoming a conduit for God, and it is already happening.

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