



**Sermon preached by the Very Revd Chris Dalliston,
Dean of Peterborough**

Peterborough Cathedral, Cathedral Eucharist, Sunday 21st January 2018

Reading: John 2: 2-11

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

According to John, Jesus' ministry begins with a problem.

As Mary succinctly puts it: They have no wine!

Wherever you look those words seem to resonate in our own straightened times.

Turn on the *Today* programme any day, any week and you will soon be reminded of the nation's need for continued restraint and austerity in terms of public finance. Public sector pay must be held in check; of course we must invest in infrastructure, education, the NHS but there is only so much we can do to ease the pressure on over-stressed commuters, over-worked staff and over-long waiting lists. In fact you only have to step outside the precincts of this Cathedral to recognise how immediate all these issues are.

Equally, if we are seeking spiritual solace then only turn the pages of the *Church Times* and you will read laments about our lack of people, our lack of money our lack of capacity. If only we had more; then think what we could do!

And here in this Cathedral we continue to live in the shadow of a narrative that emphasises all that is complex, difficult and demanding – the need to re-structure, to cut our garment according to our cloth, the challenge to build a sustainable future.

They have no wine.

Except we do.

This morning, and every day, as for the past 900 years and more, those who come to this Cathedral are invited to “drink this in remembrance” - the new wine of the Kingdom of God.

Gathering for the Eucharist we are fed with the bread of life and offered a foretaste of the marriage supper of the Lamb proclaimed so vividly in the reading from Revelation.

Meeting one another in prayer and worship and fellowship we find that we are among the company of those who, whatever our story, our successes or failures, our gifts or seeming lack of them, are among the children of God, called and precious in his sight.

And so we come, with all our questions, hesitations and uncertainties not because we are full but because we are empty – we know our lack - our Want – of meaning and purpose – above all our need of God. Didn't Jesus say that it was those who knew their need of God who would find blessing?

For indeed it is when, and only when, we recognise our dependency on God's grace that we can begin to be the kind of church God calls us to be – come to that the kind of Christians God calls us to be.

So to the Wedding in Cana of Galilee.

They have no wine.

Mary identifies the practical challenge facing the chief steward of the feast (I think I have some sneaking sympathy for this particular individual).

How has this happened? Where has the strategic plan gone awry? We don't know but we do know that something needs to happen or the guests will be scandalised, the Bridegroom and his family humiliated and the party will be over.

So Mary brings the situation to Jesus and invites him to act. More than invites him really, ignoring his first apparently dismissive response "my hour has not yet come" (Oh yes it has!) she instructs the servants: "Do whatever he tells you"

And things start to happen, all hands on deck; they gather the massive stone jars and as Jesus instructs them, fill them to the brim with water.

Draw some out and take it to the chief steward he says and well, we all know what follows:

There is enough. More than enough – in fact there is an absurd, gratuitous abundance – more wine than even the thirsty guests of Cana can consume.

Sharing together, working in partnership with one another and under God, those gathered at the Wedding Feast at Cana in Galilee discover that God has provided more than they could have imagined or desired. This is not magic – miracles are not the product of holy wishful thinking – they take place at the intersection of human and divine activity – they require energy and shared commitment; there is a degree of planning, toil and debate hidden below the surface of this story but also there, in plain view, as in this Cathedral, is the one who makes all things new, who never abandons those whom he calls and whose transforming power is available to all who call on him.

By a curious or perhaps providential piece of planning my last sermon in Newcastle just two weeks ago at Evensong happened to be on the same Gospel reading. In Newcastle the Cathedral, once the parish church of Newcastle and whilst a fine building a much smaller institution than this, could have no expectations of special favours nor be afforded unique status in that great city. Whatever we achieved or sought to achieve there came through seeking to discern the deep needs of the community and the city and to seek to shape a ministry of service that accorded with the loving purposes of Christ; reaching out to the vulnerable, the lost and the searching; to those of other faiths and to those of none.

Perhaps there is no need to spell out how all this applies to us in Peterborough.

Here we know our need. We recognise or have come to recognise, our dependency above all on the grace and mercy of God. Equally there are others with needs we do have the resources to meet – deep spiritual and practical needs that this place and we its people are called to discern and to play our part in addressing.

We shall need discipline, there will be at times be more hard choices to be made, we will need to acknowledge and own our interdependence: friends and strangers, lay and clergy (remember that wonderful little interplay between Abraham and Melchizedek in our first reading). Above all we shall need to be brave, to try new things, to dare to trust that God has plans for us, that it is Christ's time for us and that we must be open to the future to which God calls us.

Among the many excellent things that my predecessor Charles did, was to make sure the doors to this Cathedral were not only open but seen to be open – we need to ensure that we find ways to fling them wide that many may come to share in the wedding banquet of the Lamb, to participate in the party that Christ throws for his beloved children and to which in love he yearns that all may come, for Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!

And the doors need also to be wide open to let us out – strengthened with the bread of life to show God's love to the city and to the communities within which we all are set.

United in this shared task we begin this year of celebration dwelling, not on all we lack but with deep thanksgiving for all that God has done for us over 900 years and with a profound confidence that he will sustain and abundantly bless us in all that is yet to be.

Amen.