

A wedding feast with Jesus

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High Street Uniting Church Frankston

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On a day when we are also celebrating a baptism

Read: John 2:1-11

*Loving God, May your word to us be more than a sign, but a gift of grace and truth.
In the name of Christ. Amen.*

Just over a year ago I was at a wedding, as one of the two getting married. There weren't lots of people there in person, though we were delighted that many were able to join over zoom. In covid times, weddings are challenging, and invitations, until recently, have been limited.

This wedding story is one of the earliest stories from Jesus' ministry. He'd not long prior been baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. John was a cousin or a second-cousin or however you work these things out, to Jesus, and so maybe John was at the wedding too. You know what John was like - He was bit unpredictable, being a prophet; he was possibly a bit unkempt; probably more inclined to fasting than partying, as much as both have their place. He went around urging people to turn from their sins to God, which might have sounded both hopeful, and joyful, and confronting. I wonder: if you were putting on a wedding, would you invite John the Baptist? Could you imagine John among your relatives and friends? Would he fit right in, or be off to the side?

We don't know if John was there, but Jesus was. Would you have invited Jesus? Jesus' reputation may not have been established at that point, but in hindsight, Jesus became known for attracting a certain amount of scandal. He pushed some of the conventional religious rules. He was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. He certainly went to a lot of dinners with a lot of different people, even if what he did there was talk about religion – one of the taboo dinner conversations, at least in our culture. ...although maybe he talked less about religion as such, and more about life situations of the people in front of him: offering healing and inclusion to those on the margins, sometimes healing people or forgiving people right there at dinner, and criticizing those Pharisees who wanted to exclude them.

I could imagine him going to a dinner at the Park Hotel, where Novak Djokovic was briefly resident, and talking with both detention guards and the indefinitely-held refugees and detainees there, offering healing and hope and challenging those who thought that scandalous. I don't think Jesus' focus would have been on the short-term residents privileged with choices, but on those detainees with very few good choices at all. He would be quite a guest at a meal there.

Which brings me back to my question: if you were putting on a wedding, would you invite Jesus?

The families who were involved in the wedding in our Bible reading may never have realised just how good a thing it was that Jesus was there, because apart from his disciples and the stewards, it seems that no-one actually knew where the good wine had come from. And there was a lot of it – the big stone jars could well have equated to something like 500 litres.

But there's no great interest in proclaiming this as a "miracle", or proclaiming Jesus as a miracle worker. In fact, it's possible that that's precisely a label that Jesus would prefer to avoid. Instead of calling it a miracle, it's a *sign* for those who get to see it: a demonstration of what the kingdom of God is like, and a *sign* of Jesus' authority.

In the Old Testament there are a number of stories which talk about the Kingdom of God in terms of a feast or a banquet, even a wedding banquet, where there is fine wine and people are free in community together. This is indeed a sign that Jesus is heralding just that kingdom.

It's funny that Jesus turned water into wine, but had refused to turn stones into bread. How that happened is important: Jesus had been baptised, and at his baptism heard the words over him that he was God's child, God's beloved, and that God delighted in him even before he'd done anything. These are words for us to hear, too.

The devil then tempts Jesus, asking him to prove that he was the beloved Son of God through turning stones to bread like a miraculous Santa Claus figure, but Jesus refused – he did not have to prove to the devil that he was loved by God. Jesus already knew that from his baptism. When we are baptised, we are reminded that God's love for us comes before we do or fail to do anything; we are God's children, we are loved, and God delights in us, as we are.

After that, what Jesus does do is support and bless a celebration of love and community as a sign of God's Kingdom. That's something we try to reflect here, as we celebrate in worship and celebrate baptism, even joined through phones and zoom.

Baptism identifies us with the Jesus whose kingdom is one of inclusion and hospitality and grace.

There was one more guest at the wedding in our reading that I want to come back to. Jesus' mother was there. Un-named in John's gospel, Jesus' mother had learnt to trust Jesus, and while she may have prompted him before his time had come, so to speak, nevertheless, without her, this may not have happened.

Jesus' initial reluctance was because Jesus' true glory was never going to be as a wine-maker, even if that wine was very good – Jesus' true glory is to be seen on the cross, where

we see how far God goes for us, and that death is not defeat. Mary will be there then, too. In John's gospel it talks about how we are all drawn to God when Jesus is lifted up.

I started by asking if you would invite Jesus to a wedding. Perhaps the point is rather that Jesus loves good celebrations of inclusion and community, and he draws and invites us to join the kingdom feast.