National Aboriginal Sunday

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

Epiphany + 2 – Jn 2 1-11 – The wedding at Cana

Many families have their '*awkward-drinks-moment-at-the-wedding*' story. At Anna and Chris's wedding last year, they thought they'd arranged everything perfectly for their reception – having taken a deep breath and gone for *The Platinum Catering Package*. But closer to the big day, they read the fine print a bit more closely and discovered that *The Platinum Catering Package* only included what you might call *The Electroplated Drinks Package*. They were horrified! It would mean such disgrace before all their friends and family. So they took the necessary steps to avoid such shame.

If you think *we're* hyper-sensitive about the honour and shame attached to hospitality, just travel in a so-called developing country and see how central hospitality is. A poor family will put everything they have for the coming month before a stranger. But like the steward at the wedding at Cana, we can be blind to the love and care that lies behind the good things set before us.

So maybe the fact that Jesus begins his public ministry in John's Gospel with an act of extreme hospitality should be no surprise. I was talking with a friend who thought there must have been plenty of other, higher causes looking for divine intervention. – but there you go; hospitality was the choice.

Water to wine at Cana is the first of Jesus' seven signs in John's Gospel *(water to wine, 3 healings, feeding 5,000, walking on water, and raising Lazarus)* – signs pointing beyond themselves to reveal his glory; signs to alert us see, to hear, and to believe. Ancient prophecies Amos 9.13 and Joel 3.18 named an extravagant abundance of wine – *the*

mountains dripping with wine – as being a sign of the joyous arrival of God's new age. So for any with eyes to see, what happened at Cana that day dripped with significance.

Still, there are puzzling aspects to the story of Jesus' first sign. One is the peculiar conversation with his Mother which sets it in motion. He's not being rude when he answers her, *Woman, what's that to you and me.* He's just being clear about who *does* call the shots. God. And that strange expression – *My hour has not yet come* – will only become clear later on. Then there's the fact that only the servants know what's happened and where the wine came from. For everyone else, even the steward in charge of all the arrangements, the sign is only experienced by him and the guests as the mysterious, providential arrival of 500-700 litres of top-quality wine right when it's needed. Why the secrecy?

Later in the reading, we get to hear that the disciples did know what had happened; [11]*Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him*. So this sign did its work – albeit only in a pretty muted way. It pointed beyond itself to the revelation of God in Jesus, to help us truly see, hear, and believe. The disciples saw and believed. Now it's our turn.

But what *do* we see and believe? We're confronted by this story of extravagant abundance in a world plagued by poverty, disease, injustice and hunger – so often of human making. So we might look at this sign and get hung up on whether miracles happen, whether this made any difference to the big picture – any number of logical concerns. But that means we miss the main thing this sign points us to. And what's that? It's the fact that our in world, we're frequently blessed with unexpected grace and we don't recognise it when it happens. We may be looking the other way. That's why the mindfulness movement these days is such an important idea. We need to have our eyes open to the signs, and see God's love as the source

of life’s good gifts. We need to see to believe.

We might also become aware of the power of prayer to make a difference even to a seemingly hopeless situation. Jesus’ Mother joined those dots; her prayer was simply to say what was wrong. And for God, the mutual honour of hospitality was a good enough reason to respond. So let me conclude with a prayer written for today in another seemingly hopeless situation; this time, one of abused hospitality.

A Prayer of Defiant Hope – *Written by Safina Stewart for Aboriginal Sunday 2025*

God of Justice, help us engage.
This land is stained with blood and tears,
But your love defies all apathy and despair.
God of all time, help us believe.
This vast and ancient land sings with defiant hope,
Reveal the pathways to healing, connection and true community.
God of Mercy, help us hear.
The old people inspired and dared us to take a tangible stand,
Our First Nations family call for we, the Australian church,
to uplift and pray.
God of Grace, help us represent.
Shine your guiding light on our nation’s darkest moments
That we might be a part of the freedom story in your
mysterious kingdom.
God of Hope, help us grow.
Sink our roots deep to weather any storms
Help us stand in our birthright and inheritance
as we sing with defiant hope of your faithfulness and love.
Amen