**John 2:1-11**

**Jesus Understands. Jesus Cares.**

What’s the most embarrassing thing that’s ever happened to you in public? We’ve all got stories from our lives, I’m sure. I’ve embarrassed myself so many times in public, it hurts to think about it! I’m not going to reveal some of those moments…

 But I do remember a few years back being invited to the Archdeacon’s house for dinner; a bit of a posh occasion and, of course, I was on my very best behavior. And when we sat down to eat, I was sitting on a really gorgeous chair, very ornate, and I commented on how lovely it was. The Archdeacon said, Yes, it was one of his prized possessions: a chair from the Georgian period that had been handed down through the generations of his family. So, the dinner is in full flow, all going well, and me making a great impression so far. And the Archdeacon tells a funny joke and I lean back in the chair, laughing hard and…you’ve guessed it…the back of the chair splinters into pieces and I end up on my back on the floor with the remains of this family heirloom balanced across my legs.

 I wasn’t invited back again…I wonder why?

 Public embarrassments are awful things, aren’t they? And it can take us years to live them down, if we ever do…

 The reading we’ve just heard from the Gospel, about this wedding at Cana in Galilee, is a story about a major social embarrassment and about how Jesus saves the day.

 But it’s about more than that too: because this is a story about how we can relate to Jesus in our everyday lives, not just on a Sunday, and how Jesus can make a difference, a really positive difference to how we live on a day-to-day basis.

 Before we get into the meat of the story, let’s just skip to the end for a moment…

 At the end of this story, in verse 11, John makes this comment: “What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory”.

 In John’s Gospel, Jesus does 7 particular actions, 7 signs that point to him being the Son of God and it’s important that the turning of water into wine is one of those signs because it tells us something really important about God. To run out of wine at a wedding would have been a major social embarrassment. Weddings often went on for about 7 days and it was expected that the wine would keep going for the whole time. In fact, there are written documents to show that, in Jesus’ time, if the wine ran out at a wedding, guests sometimes sued their hosts for damages - which seems a bit harsh to me, but they obviously took their wine-drinking pretty seriously in that culture!

 Anyway, the hosts had run out of wine here in Cana and Jesus intervenes to help them out, which is the first of his signs in John’s Gospel. And what that tells us about God is that he really cares about what happens in our lives. God is not some remote, distant Being, sitting above the clouds in the sky. Instead, God is actively involved in the world and he wants to be actively involved in your life and mine and he wants to involve himself in all the minutiae of our lives to make sure that we enjoy fullness of life to the max.

 The first sign of Jesus’ glory, according to John’s Gospel, is Jesus getting involved to sort out a socially embarrassing situation at a wedding. That’s the type of God we worship: a God who really cares about our lives in all its detail, and really and truly wants what is best for us and will get involved in our lives, really get his hands dirty for us to impact us for good.

 God is fully active in the world, making a difference to how we live. And so each one of us can pray to God with confidence: confident that he really is interested in every aspect of our lives, no matter how small or inconsequential we might think it to be.

 But this morning, it’s not really the miracle of turning water into wine that I want to think about. Instead, I want to focus on the parts of the story that we often overlook, which is how people responded to Jesus in this situation and what it is that we can learn for ourselves about how we might respond to Jesus in our own lives.

 And the first thing to say is simply this:

**1. Jesus was invited to the party**

Now this might seem a strange thing to say, but in verse 2 it says, “Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding”.

 Since I became a Vicar 25 years ago, I have done well over two hundred weddings, and I rarely go to the Wedding Reception afterwards unless I really know the couple very well. And if I do go to the Reception, it always makes me smile. Because I walk into the Reception in my suit and dog collar and everyone is sitting down at their allotted table and I start to look around for my name on the card marking where I am to sit. And so often you can almost see the frozen smiles on people’s faces as they look up at me walking around the tables. Their faces are a welcoming smile but you can almost hear their brain screaming out, “Please don’t let the Vicar sit next to me, please don’t let the Vicar sit next to me”. Because they want to have a few drinks – or more – and laugh at a few rude jokes and have a bit of a gossip with their mates. And what could be worse than the Vicar sitting down next to them? The worst type of Wedding Nightmare for them!!

 Vicars as a breed, maybe Christians in general too, are viewed by many people as killjoys; not the type of person that you would invite to your party.

 So how interesting is it that Jesus and his disciples were actually invited? Jesus was not viewed as being antisocial or a killjoy. Jesus was clearly fun to be around. There was something about Jesus that people felt comfortable with and they weren’t afraid to have him at their party where the wine was flowing freely.

 Now, Jesus wants to be a part of your life. But how do you view Jesus? What do you think about him being in your life? Do you think Jesus is your killjoy? Does the thought of being in a relationship with Jesus take the fun out of your life? Do you keep Jesus in a little ‘Sunday Box’, where you can be all religious in church but you pack him away for the rest of the week so you can go about your fun unimpeded by this stern, killjoy image of Jesus that you may have created in your own mind?

 If so, you are worshipping the wrong Jesus! You are worshipping a Jesus self-created in your own mind, and not the Jesus of the Bible.

 The Jesus of the Bible gets invited to the party and people know that he is fun to have around.

 I wonder if one of the biggest barriers in your life to following Jesus more deeply is the fact that you have created a Jesus in your mind who is an antisocial killjoy, stern, judgmental and boring, who will take all the fun out of your life?

 That is not the Jesus of the Bible. In the Bible, Jesus is invited to the party…and people love having him there. That’s the Jesus who wants to get involved in your life: so why not invite him to your party?

The second thing to say is this:

**2. Jesus was a family man and knows your struggles**

Jesus wasn’t married, of course, but he was a family man and his family was really important to him. Elsewhere in the Bible, we are told that Jesus had brothers and sisters: he had four brothers called James, Joseph, Jude and Simon, and also some sisters whose names we are not told. His dad, Joseph, probably died when he was young and Jesus grew up as the oldest brother with all the family responsibilities that came with that.

 And it was probably a family wedding that Jesus was attending that day, because his mother Mary seems to have had some sort of stewarding role at the wedding, which is why, in verse 3, she notices the wine has run out and comes to Jesus with the problem (we’ll come back to that in a minute).

 Many of us here today are blessed with families – but we all know the problems that come with that: caring for elderly or sick parents, looking after children, perhaps multiple children, and the demands on our time with that, maybe caring for grandchildren during the week, or trying to navigate a difficult relationship with a brother or sister.

 Family hassles – we all have them at one time or another…

 And Jesus was a family man too, so he knows all about your issues and he can relate to that. So, again, you can pray to him about all that stuff in confidence: confident in the knowledge that he hears and understands and will stand with you – through his own experience – in all the stresses and anxieties that family life breeds.

 So first, Jesus doesn’t want to be the killjoy in our lives.

 Second, Jesus understands the hassles of family living and understands our stresses.

**3. We are happiest in our lives when we are obedient to Jesus**

Now that may sound like a strange thing to say, because we all want a bit of freedom in our lives to do whatever we want; it’s only natural. But Jesus doesn’t take our freedom away. Instead, he creates safe boundaries around our lives so that we can know joy to the max.

 You know how it is in a children’s playground: there’s the slide and the roundabout and those funny little bouncy horses and stuff and the kids have a great time running around from ride to ride. But the parameters of the playground are marked out with a fence that keeps dogs out and children in. Plenty of room for them to play and have fun but within the boundaries of safety and well-being.

 I sometimes think that is a good metaphor for the Christian life: Jesus puts boundaries around us but leaves us plenty of space within that to play and enjoy a relationship with him. And it’s when we are obedient to those boundaries that we are at our happiest.

 When we look at this story from John’s Gospel, we see that shift in thinking in Mary, the mother of Jesus.

 In verse 3, Mary relates to Jesus as a mother does to an eldest son and comes to him with a problem: she says, “They have no more wine”. This is a typical mother-son conversation, probably born out of the fact that, since Joseph’s death, Jesus was the responsible male in the household. But just a few moments later, her relationship with Jesus is transformed when she tells the servants at the wedding, “Do whatever he tells you”.

 In a matter of moments, she moves from thinking about Jesus as her son and starts thinking about him as her Lord. Mary shifts her thinking from seeing Jesus as a family-fixer to being a Lord whose will must be obeyed. And she knows that obedience to his will is the only way to address the problem she is facing.

 Now, I think this is crucial for us if we want to allow Jesus the space to make a difference in our lives. Like Mary, when we pray to God, we can just name the problem and leave it with him. Mary says, “They have no more wine” – simple as that: she doesn’t try to analyze the situation, she doesn’t give Jesus any suggestions on how to fix the situation, she doesn’t ask him for various options to choose between. Mary just names the problem and leaves it with him. And we can do just that when we pray to God: name the problem and leave it with him.

 But – and here is the crucial bit – when Jesus comes up with a solution, we must have the courage and the obedience to follow his will. As Mary says here, “Do whatever he tells you”.

 Now, sometimes that is hard to do. We might name a problem to God and, as we pray, we may get a sense of what we need to do to get a solution to that problem and we may not like the answer and so we are tempted to say to God, “Thanks for the advice. Have you got any other options?” I get that so often when I am hurt by someone’s words or actions. I might name the problem to God – and then I am aware of God saying to me, “Forgive her” or “Forgive him”. Yeah, thanks for that, God. Can’t I just stay angry for a bit longer and bear my grudge a bit more? I’ll feel so much better if you let me do that…“No. Forgive her”.

 Name the problem. But then be obedient to the solution, no matter how hard it may appear to be…

 And don’t you think the servants would have thought Jesus was a bit crazy by asking for 180 gallons of water to be brought to him? They would have wondered what this crazy carpenter was going to do with it all. But, without questioning, they obeyed him and the miracle happened…

 So it can be in our lives. Name your problem before God. Leave it with him. Obey the response. That is the only way to true happiness…

So this is a fascinating story that is about so much more than just a miracle by Jesus because it teaches us so much about how we can relate to Jesus in our everyday lives, from Monday to Saturday.

 Firstly, Jesus is not some killjoy out to stop you having fun, so don’t let that idea put you off forming a deeper relationship with him.

 Secondly, Jesus was a family man himself, so he really does understand the hassles many of you are going through.

 Thirdly, Jesus will hear your prayers and will empathize with your problems, so just name them, leave them with him, and then obey him when he points out to you the solution and way forward.

 Jesus wants to make such a profound difference in our lives.

 Jesus wants us to know joy and happiness and to have life in all its fullness.

 Jesus understands. Jesus cares.

 Maybe we need to start thinking abut Jesus is a fresh way so that the real Jesus – the Jesus of the Bible – can be fully active in our lives, leading us into the future of joy and happiness that we long for…