

As a former student of literature, I like nothing more than to get my teeth into a good story and plumb it for meaning. As a social scientist, I also love to explore phenomena to expose their underlying mechanisms. So I couldn't have been happier when I saw that today's Gospel is the story of Jesus turning water into wine. I was certain it would offer grist for both my right- and my left-brained selves.

So—what happened at the wedding feast in Cana, and what does it mean? In preparation, I did a little background reading on how the story has been understood by people with a great deal more knowledge than I. I learned that theologians are still debating whether we should read the story as a historic record that water physically became wine, or whether we should interpret it as an allegory. “Allegory!” my right brain positively shouted, and we were off. I found myself in a scholarly debate about what the physical elements of the story might represent. What does the water symbolise? Is Jesus the new Adam and his mother the new Eve? Is Jesus the bridegroom in the story and the church the bride, or does the good wine presented by the steward actually represent Jesus himself? The possibilities became dizzyingly more complex and esoteric and, I had to admit, less and less helpful in my quest to make meaning of the story.

“I told you so!” Left Brain gloated, muttering “Allegory, shmallegory. I keep telling you to stick with the facts. I’ve done some research and I have some resources lined up for you.” I got a mini-lesson explaining why Jesus’ remark to his mother is “proof” that Catholics’ devotion to Mary is “unscriptural”, and another one proclaiming that Jesus’ turning the water into wine provides biblical evidence against some Christians’ practice of teetotalism. I read about an article speculating that it was one of Mary’s relatives who was getting married, and another that it was the wedding of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, and finally a bizarre justification of polygamy by a Mormon leader who died in 1878, claiming that it was actually the wedding of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, Martha *and* Mary of Bethany! I began to despair of finding anything to say about this story at all.

But then I wondered whether I was chasing shadows. Perhaps the point of the story is quite simple, after all. As I like to do, I put my whole self in the story itself, and humbled by my failed foray into exegesis, decide that I had best be one of the servants. As one of the household, I’d been part of the wedding preparations for months. But despite all our planning, that night, there was an uneasy buzz amongst the servants as one wine jug after another was emptied more rapidly than we had expected. It soon became clear that the wine supplies were quite inadequate for the crowd—the entire village was

there—and that we were going to run out. This was nothing short of a disaster! Not only would our master be humiliated in front of all his guests, but he would also be furious with us. No telling what the punishment would be. We tried to think of where we could get more wine, but everyone who might have helped was at the wedding. The situation seemed completely impossible.

Somehow, one of the women got hold of the news that the wine had run out. I suppose by that time we were getting desperate and had become less discrete in our whispered conversations. We stood around awkwardly while she told one of the other guests about our predicament. Later, we learned that she was his mother, but we didn't know that at the time. He was with a group of his friends, and he didn't seem too pleased at being interrupted by her. But then the strangest thing happened. She ordered us to do whatever he said, and he told us to fill the jars with water—at least we had plenty of that!—and to draw some out and take it to the head steward. We had no idea what was going on, but we did as we were told. To our amazement, when the steward tasted it, he nodded his approval and said that this wine was even better than the earlier jars we'd been serving, and that we should start filling the guests' cups. Wine? What wine? We had served the steward a cup of water from the jars we had filled ourselves. How on earth had this stranger made wine when

there was only water before? What had happened? I saw the looks on his friends' faces, and realised that there was no trick, that something quite momentous had occurred, and that whatever explanation there might be was beyond anything that I had ever experienced before.

When I think of it this way, the story becomes exactly what I know it to be from childhood—a miracle, or an event that inspires wonder and astonishment, a story that challenges my understanding of the world as a place where causes are followed by rational effects, actions are followed by predictable consequences, and water and wine are two entirely different substances. That world is a WYSIWYG world—WYSIWYG—What You See Is What You Get—where we weigh what we can do by the resources that we can see or touch or count, where we operate within the limitations that frame our human-ness, and where the word “impossible” has currency.

But the world of this miracle is quite a different world. What is this world like? We are given a clue in the coda to the story, where we are told, “Jesus did this, the first of his signs...and revealed his glory”. The miracle is a sign, and like all signs, what is important about it is not the sign itself, but what it points to. The sign points to Jesus' glory, so that everyone can see it. His disciples believed in him. The sign points to a world where we offer to God the resources that we have; where, while acknowledging our human-ness, we

do not impose our human limitations on God; and where, as a result, it is the word “possible” that has currency.

I believe that we have seen this world revealed time and again right here at St. Andrew’s. If you don’t believe me, go to our website and read the history of our parish. From 1986 until 2000, with dwindling membership and struggling finances, St. Andrew’s was a parochial mission of St. John’s Cathedral, with the cathedral assuming responsibility for the vicar’s salary and providing funding for badly needed major repairs to the church. In 2008, the cost of the proposed expansion exceeded the estimate by an unattainable \$800,000. In 2009, there were two or three children here and no resources with which to build a children’s ministry. And yet—look around today! What happened? And what does it mean? We now have 3 Sunday services, with more than 200 people worshipping here on any given Sunday and a seat for everyone. What happened? And what does it mean? Next Sunday, the vestry will present a balanced budget of almost \$700,000, the bulk of which is supported by parishioners’ commitment to our ministries in the form of pledges. What happened? And what does it mean? Our worship is enhanced by one of the finest church music programmes in the country, and our choir is backed up weekly by a growing chorus of babies, in whom we take utter delight. What happened? And what does it mean? At our early service every

Sunday, children crowd around the altar. We have a middle school programme and a need to start a high school group. What happened? And what does it mean? As you will read in the ministries report prepared for next Sunday's annual meeting, old ministries have been re-invigorated and new ministries have formed. What happened? And what does it mean?

In 2016, we will continue to be challenged. The limitations of our space as we continue to grow are very real. What will happen? We offer what we might call "passive hospitality" every night to people who sleep behind our bushes and between our dumpsters. What will happen? We are asked to support the diocesan capital campaign to expand the capacity of Cathedral Ridge to offer programs for youth leadership, camps for children, regardless of their ability to pay, and opportunities for Christian, Jewish, and Muslim youth to live and learn together. What will happen?

Shall we say, "It's impossible! We don't have the resources! We wish we could, but we can't!" Or instead, like the disciples who witnessed Jesus' first sign at the wedding at Cana, where he revealed his glory, shall we believe in him? As we always do, we have a choice. What will happen? And what will it mean?