

2024-01-21 ... 10am Worship Service Sermon ...

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When have you felt most embarrassed?

I can remember the first time I had to wear spectacles to school. I was 11 years old and in my first year at Secondary School. It made me look different and my class mates were not very forgiving. They poked fun at me. I felt so ashamed of my glasses that I ended up having a fight in the playground with someone who had been a friend.

When have you felt really embarrassed?

I can remember trying to go snorkelling in Kenya and finding that I couldn't manage to put my face into the water. It felt really silly with people all around me able to do it.

What's your most embarrassing moment?

My worst in church was being called up to help with the chalice at Communion in my church in Didsbury, Manchester and tripping over the steps on the way up to the altar. I fell flat on my face in front of everyone and then found everyone sniggering as I gave them the cup. How did I feel? ... I wished that the ground would open and swallow me up!

In our reading from John's Gospel the bridegroom was going to be very embarrassed.

This was supposed to be his special time. He was responsible for the celebration. And he has not bought enough wine. Perhaps he had underestimated how much wine he'd need. Perhaps he didn't have the money to buy enough wine, even the cheapest available, to meet his needs. But, in the village society at that time, there

was no room for excuses - it was his duty to pay for the celebration. Deeply embarrassed, perhaps red in the face, getting hot, wanting a hole to open up and swallow him. Can you imagine him worrying, waiting for the complaints from his guests to roll in.

Can you imagine his self-pitying prayer: ‘Why does this always happen to me? ... Please Lord don’t let anyone notice.’

But one guest did notice. Mary saw and told Jesus. And Jesus quietly set to work. He gets the servants to fill the six water pots with water, the water is turned into wine and the bridegroom’s embarrassment turns to amazement and joy. The equivalent of over 700 bottles of wine, the finest wine appears from nowhere. No longer does the bridegroom face shame and humiliation.

The reading concludes: Jesus performed this first miracle..... there he revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him. Those who were with Jesus knew that this was an act of divine power - an act in which the personal situation of the bridegroom was transformed.

This miracle revealed the nature of Jesus’ ministry: Jesus, the provider of joy, transforming sadness and embarrassment into experiences of gladness and rejoicing. Jesus, the one who can overcome our mistakes/failings, bringing good out of seeming disaster. Transforming things, changing things, making things new.

This is one of the messages of the Gospel reading set for today. ...This is what God is like. If Jesus transformed that one situation, then God can transform the situations that we find ourselves in today.

Perhaps we’ve made mistakes - like the bridegroom without

enough wine. We may look back over our lives, and think: if only I'd not done or said that. There may be things that have happened in the last few days – we've done or said something we regret. These things can linger with us, leaving us feeling embarrassed, ashamed, and not knowing what to do.

Perhaps we are low in resources - like the bridegroom who couldn't provide adequately for his guests? There are times when we feel spiritually dry, we struggle to pray, we wonder where God is. Or we feel physically weak, no energy to do what matters. Or emotionally drained, with no motivation to sustain relationships, or to get on with our work.

Perhaps life is full of sadness - like the bridegroom who sees his joyful day disappearing before his eyes. We see others around who are happy, but find it hard to be like them. We know that others think we should be smiling, but it's not as easy as all that.....

Whether things have been just trivial or were actually more significant in nature, this is the sign with which John chooses to begin his account of Jesus' ministry. This Gospel reading says clearly that God, in Jesus, is ready to transform these situations. He can, and does, break into our lives. We think or feel that we are defined by the past, by our mistakes and failings. But God says, No! Just as Jesus transformed the bridegroom's day from failure to joy, God can transform our lives bringing good out of the mess we see in our lives.

God can act unilaterally, but more often than not it is through others around us. Those who notice the way things are and do something. ... But action isn't always the most appropriate thing. When we see our friends or family members struggling - we can follow Mary's example. We can talk quietly to Jesus, in the background, and we can have confidence that we have done the

right thing. For we have given their situation to God. And God is able to work for good in any situation.

And when Jesus acts, when God acts, we may be amazed at what happens. The bridegroom didn't just receive enough wine to get by on. He got good, fine wine - more than he needed, better than he needed. The generosity of God at the wedding in Cana was overwhelming. ... And when Jesus acts to transform our situations, our lives, we can expect this same generosity.

However, with Jesus, it's often not about quick fixes that solve the problem for the moment. No, God's work in our lives will often be quiet, often over the longer term. We may experience setbacks, but God will not give up on us.

We can experience transformation, and as Jesus works in our lives the glory of God will be revealed - just as it was at Cana. And we can be part of that transformation in the lives of others by taking the mess and muddle that we see to God, by asking God to break in a bring hope and transformation.

Lord Jesus,
just as you transformed
the situation of the bridegroom at Cana
may you work in our lives,
transforming our embarrassments, our inadequacies, our
sadnesses, our mistakes
into experiences of gladness and joy,
to the glory of your name,
Amen.