

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Evelyn Sweerts on Sunday 20 January 2019

Text: John 2.1-11

Year C: Epiphany 3

The story we've just heard is not the story. What we've just listened to is a description of an event that took place in the margins. If you asked the wedding guests, they'd have said it was pretty much just a wedding although the groom did some great dancing and it was a bit odd because the wine got better as the feast went on – though that may have been the effect of the wine! If *Hello* magazine picked this up, they'd focus on the bride and groom... And *The Times* wouldn't have picked it up at all. The pages would be full of the Emperor's latest economic or military policies and which gladiators were doing well in the latest Games, perhaps with a style insert on the latest in ladies' sandals.

We forget. We forget that what we have made central is in fact marginal.

And because we forget that, we forget that we are to keep doing that, if we are to discover Jesus at work in the world today. We must look to the margins, remembering that *that* is where our story as Jesus people is unfolding. The truth, the important stuff, what's really happening – beyond the clichés and official party lines – happens at the edges.

The people who knew the story that mattered were at the margins of the wedding – Jesus, Mary, the disciples, the servants. The so-called important people like the steward and the groom didn't have a clue.

There is life at the margins, as today's Gospel shows. At the edge of the wedding, where few people noticed or knew what was really happening, a miracle took place, and the truth of Jesus' abundant kingdom was made manifest in the very best wine: fruit of the vine and work of human hands, as our prayers say.

Our story is a story of and at the edges. It happened and continues to happen mostly out of sight of the great and the good and the powerful.

So what are we to do? How do we rediscover the margins, and what do we do when we get there?

The first bit is easy: the margins are right here, right now, our lives, every day. Just like Jesus and Mary *happened* to be at a wedding, wherever we happen to be *is* where the REAL story is happening.

The story we have made central – not just changing water into wine but the whole Gospel – was not the central story, objectively assessed. Jesus was two one-line notes in Josephus' grand history of the Jewish people. It wasn't seen to be the real story, but it *was* the real story. *That* is what we need to get – deeply, in flesh and bones and head and heart.

We were *right* to make it the central story. It IS about Jesus. Kings, princes, celebrities – Ozymandiases, one and all, who are briefly important and powerful and then vanish into the sands of time.

The marginal story IS the story. And our marginal and seemingly fleeting lives are where it's happening. In our every day lives of joy and sorrow and anger and mostly humdrumness water is turning into the very best wine before our eyes, if we have eyes to see it.

We are being turned from water into wine by the work of the Spirit.

Sunlight and frost on cobwebs, a child's laughter, white sheets billowing in the spring wind, beautiful music, weeping in the night that becomes joy in the morning, an unexpected hug, nourishing food, a friend you can call just because – everywhere, everywhere are grace notes, is water turning to wine at the edge of the feast of life.

And that brings me to the second question: what are we to do at the margins? When we have seen again that our seemingly insignificant lives are where it's happening, and probably it's mostly happening at the edges of our lives, what do we do?

This is where Mary, as presented in this story, helps us. Whilst the disciples sit there passively – they only believe in Jesus *after* he has revealed his glory through this sign – Mary appears to have faith in what Jesus can do already, before there is any recorded miracle. She already believes in him. And because of her faith in him, she talks to him about what's going on, and what's needed.

We don't think of this as prayer because he was there in the flesh, but is the dynamic not just like prayer? "Jesus, there's a problem, please do something!" And then Mary trusts that he will.

Since there's no such thing as praying too much, could we see this as an invitation to follow Mary's example? To NOTICE what's needed, to TALK to Jesus about it, and as far as we are able, TRUST him for an answer. That's what we do standing at the margins, and it is enough. That's how the margins become the real story.

Just talking to Jesus about what's going on... It's easier than it sounds. It doesn't matter if our faith is weak, we can still talk – even if we have a sneaking and unvoiced suspicion that we're talking to ourselves, or into the void. Jesus still hears us.

It doesn't matter if we're not convinced that "that's how God works" because God can work out how God works, and use what we say anyway.

What about if we think we don't deserve to be listened to, or if we think the topics are unworthy of God's attention? Well, we DO deserve to be listened to just because we ARE, and nothing is unworthy of God's attention because

nothing is beneath God's notice. We worship a God who counts the hairs on our heads, cares for the sparrows and clothes the lilies of the field.

So let's just talk to Jesus. Let's open our eyes, notice what's happening, and talk to Jesus about it. Our lives, which are probably happening far from the centres of power and celebrity, and which may feel marginal and perhaps even trivial at times, our lives are where Jesus is present, turning water into wine.

And there's a sort of virtuous circle at work, where we notice what's happening and talk to Jesus about it, and he responds, and we see his glory revealed, and we notice more, and talk more, and see more, and so on. And inspired by what we bear witness to in our lives, and nurtured by the work of the Holy Spirit, our faith, like that of the disciples, grows. Which in turn makes it easier to see, and to pray.

Let us stand to confess that faith, trusting God for its growth.