

**Welcome:**

**Call to Worship:**

*"I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, <sup>17</sup> and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. <sup>18</sup> I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."* (Ephesians 3: 16-19)

**Song: "And Can it Be" words and music by Charles Wesley, Thomas Campbell**

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**Prayer:**

Lord, it simply amazes us to know that not only can we receive your love, but we can be transformed, healed, set free, delivered and forever changed by your love. Thank you for the joy of knowing and receiving your love and power made available through Christ. As we celebrate your love, we thank you for the opportunities we have had during this isolation season to receive love from others – in the silence we name them to you; and we thank you for the opportunities we have had to show love to others – in the silence we ask you to bless and keep them.

Today, we thank you for mothers who give, serve, love, nurture, teach, guide, protect, care for and provide for their families. We pray for single mums, families with 2 mums, families who have no mother, and families who are separated from their mother for any reason – minister your peace, joy, and love into the hearts of all. Give them patience, strength, creativity, wisdom, and joy. Help them to listen, teach them to love, and open the eyes of their hearts that they might know your love for them. May you bless all who nurture, give and serve in the community. And remind us to show love and care to the people you bring across our path.

Lord, we know that we have not always been faithful to live your commands, so we ask that you forgive us for not always loving you, and for failing to love others as you have called us to.

Holy Spirit fill us again with the love and power of God so that we are continually transformed and renewed. Help us to be and do all you have called us to.

We also ask that you take the tithes and offerings we have given – bless them and use them for your kingdom purposes. Amen.

As forgiven and restored people let us greet and bless each other with God's peace!

**Notices:** <https://vimeo.com/408161553> Uniting World clip

**Reading:** Katie Dart,

*"On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup> Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup> When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." <sup>6</sup> Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. <sup>9</sup> When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup> and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." <sup>11</sup> Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of*

*Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. <sup>12</sup> After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.”* (John 2:1-11)

- In the reading for today, Jesus was invited to a wedding at a town called Cana, just north of Galilee where He grew up. Jesus and His mother Mary were obviously known by the family, and so they were invited to the wedding.
- It is most likely that Mary was helping with the serving, otherwise she wouldn't have known that the wine had run out.
- Weddings in the ancient East typically lasted several days and often a whole week, and the whole village/community would attend. Thus, the family would have provided well over 3000 servings of food and wine.
- To fail to provide adequately for the guests would involve social disgrace. In the closely knit communities of Jesus' day, such an error would never be forgotten and would haunt the newly married couple all their lives.
- At such ceremonies, the Jews washed before eating to cleanse themselves from the defilement of contact with Gentiles, and other ritually defiling things, more than washing to rid themselves from dirt and germs.
- The six stone jars at this wedding were there for Jewish purification. Each jar/pot held between 20 – 30 gallons. Their combined capacity would have been between 120 – 180 gallons; or 450-680 litres of liquid.
- It was most likely that these pots were outside at the entrance to the wedding tent and Jesus and the guests were inside, so nobody really saw or knew what happened next except the disciples and maybe the servants.

*“Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. <sup>9</sup> When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup> and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.”* (John 2:6-10)

- This passage has a deep and significant meaning, and of course is invaluable as the basis of a good ‘water into wine’ joke, it's not possible for me to draw the depth of meaning from this passage in just one sermon, so today, I would like us to pause and consider the vessels/pots/jars that Jesus used in this miracle.
- It is fascinating that Jesus would use Jewish purification jars to perform His first miracle. He could have used jugs, or cups, or bowls or any other container, but He chose to use these jars.
- Ordinary, potentially unclean, unattractive, clay pots!

If you were to invite a guest into your home, I wonder what part of the house you would usher them to first... The lounge, dining, maybe outside to the verandah... My guess is you wouldn't excitedly invite them to your bathroom sink.

- Well, Jesus kind of went to the bathroom sink in this instance. He chose to use a vessel that wasn't the best or most presentable utensil at the wedding. He chose one that was a really quite average.
- You see, Jesus doesn't need the good or the best, He wants us as we are – chips, cracks, scratches, dints, ‘warts and all’.
- God will use any vessel that is open and responsive to Him – even cracked pots!
- At his birth, the angels didn't appear to the religious leaders, they appeared to lowly, unpleasant shepherds – people who were open and responsive to His word.

- When Jesus chose disciples, he didn't choose the educated, well presented, and well-respected businessmen, he chose ordinary fishermen, who failed rabbi school – people who were willing to surrender their all to follow Him.
- If we take a step back and look at a wider biblical perspective, when God chose a King for Israel, he didn't choose Jesse's oldest, better looking, better educated son, He chose David, the ruddy shepherd boy – who was a man after God's heart.
- Or when God looked for a deliverer for His people Israel, He didn't choose a well-spoken, military trained leader, he chose a fearful stutterer Moses – who surrendered to God's call despite his human frailty.
- God isn't interested in only the good and presentable parts of us like our spiritual gifts, good qualities of diligent serving, generous giving, thoughtful caring, passionate prayer, scripture-based discipleship – as fruitful as they might be.
- God loves all of us. Even our less presentable, socially unacceptable, perhaps even, unclean parts – the lazy, complacent, judgmental, depressed, cynical, 'unsanctified' parts of you and me.
- Jesus wants us to surrender not just the good parts, but also our lonely, painful, shameful, hurtful, ungodly parts as well.
- Those questions, doubts, and fears that we might be too ashamed to share with others. The uncertainty of our faith, the resentment towards the church, the anger towards God, that we prefer not to have – God sees them and loves us despite them.
- Jesus wants your bathroom sink. He wants and loves all of you, not just the good, fruitful, lovely, joy-filled, 'spiritual' parts, but the bad, unfruitful, unpleasant, ugly and unspiritual parts as well.
- Because, as this story indicates, it's not the vessel that's important, it's what God does in, with and through the vessel that makes it useful.
- God wants us to surrender our whole self to His love:

*"Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. <sup>9</sup> When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup> and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now."'" (John 2:7-10)*

- It's not how 'good, presentable and healthy' we are that makes us usable to God; it's what God does in us that makes us useful, beautiful and desirable as a vessel for His kingdom purposes.
- It is the power, love and miracle working presence of God **in** us that makes us a powerful, fruitful, life-giving vessel for His kingdom.
- This is why Paul prayed for the church:

*"I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Eph.3:18-19)*

- It is the power and love of God in us that transforms us and makes us fruitful – not our 'good parts'.
- The fruitfulness of a disciple is not based upon their goodness, but upon God's love and power at work in them and through them.

*"Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:4-5)*

- There is a very clear directive from Jesus, both in the Gospel story of the water into wine, and in this passage: it is the presence and power and love of God at work in us that makes us good, fruitful, usable, desirable, acceptable to God and for God – NOT our goodness.
- Paul also alludes to this in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians:

*“Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. <sup>8</sup> Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, <sup>9</sup> but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor. 12:7-10)*

- Paul invites us to not only notice our weaknesses or less desirable parts, but to accept and embrace them as a means for growth; and an opportunity for the grace and power and love of God to work a miracle in us over and over and over again.

Billions of dollars spent each year on self-improvement – gyms, Botox, cosmetic surgery, hair products, personal trainers, coaches, mentors (well, maybe not this year)

- Typically, our experience of personal change is limited to small, incremental shifts that are visible mainly in retrospect.
- Paul reminds us that the goal of the spiritual journey is being transformed into the image of God—the image we were created to reflect (2 Corinthians 3:18).
- Christian transformation never settles for cosmetic adjustments – like just joining a faith life group, but not really growing in faith; just reading the bible but not really being transformed by the living word; attending worship but not really experiencing the presence of God.
- Christian transformation is found in ‘doing the religious thing’.
- It involves being reborn, remade, transformed from something ordinary into something amazing, someone we were destined from eternity to be.
- We were never destined to be an unclean clay pots/jars, that’s the result of sin; we were created and destined to be a purified vessel.
- Have you ever felt ‘not good enough’ to serve God, or others in the church? That if people really knew what you were like they wouldn’t want you in their ministry team?
- Have you ever felt ashamed of some of your behaviours, attitudes or your ‘lack of spiritual depth’?
- God’s not ashamed, disappointed or unhappy with you.
- God loves you unconditionally – remember the parable of the prodigal...
- Surrendering our absolute all to the love of God is the heart of the Christian faith, because this is the only real possibility of turning away from sin.
- Turning toward Jesus and surrendering to His love is an ongoing matter. It must become a way of life.
- Jesus is here today to call each one of us all to be aware of His loving presence, to turn toward him and to surrender to His love.
- He loves you and accepts you as you are, even if you’re a cracked pot.
- Let Him take the less desirable parts of you – fear, laziness, emptiness, doubts, ambivalence... and transform them into something beautiful that will bless others.

#### **Prayer:**

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#### **Benediction:**