

# **Sermon on Sunday 16 January on Zoom by Rev. Alan Stewart**

## **Shoy**

One of the perks of being confined to quarters whilst self-isolating over Christmas was that I had time to read a few of those many books that have been sitting in an ever expanding 'to be read' pile. In one of those books, Brené Brown's 'Atlas of the Heart', I discovered a new word; shoy.

Shoy is a mashup of share and joy, and according to Brown it is 'intentionally sharing the joy of someone else by showing interest and asking follow-up questions'. In other words; taking noticeable joy in other people's joy.

The scene of today's Gospel is, I imagine, one of great joy, until that joy becomes threatened by the prospect of a major social embarrassment: The booze runs out.

Now, somehow Mary, a friend of the family, gets wind of this and shares the news with her son. We're not told if she actually expected him to do anything about it, apart from maybe sending a couple of the disciples to the local Off-licence, but Jesus' reaction does suggest that he felt some pressure from his mother to act; 'Woman' (not apparently as rude as it sounds in Aramaic) 'woman, my time has not yet come'.

At some point Jesus knew that he would have to go public with his true identity, but for whatever reason, he's not convinced this is his time. And then immediately he does this U-turn, and from water creates a superabundance of fine wine, enough wine to keep the party going for a month at least.

A good question to ask about any of the stories included in the Bible, is why? Why is it there? Why did the writer or editor choose to include that particular story?

By way of background to this story, it's important to know that weddings and wine were heavily symbolic in the religious tradition of the day. For centuries the prophets had spoken of a new age to come where God would wed his people; in other words, God would foster a deep loving relationship with them. They called this the kingdom of God and in this kingdom, wine, a symbol of joy, would flow freely.

So, this story is actually a proclamation of sorts. The huge jars Jesus used for his supernatural winemaking were traditionally used for religious cleansing, because even a Jewish wedding was subject to strict regulations about ritual washing.

So, Jesus takes these symbols of the old religious order and transforms them into something new, something about joy and celebration. This, his first public miracle, was then so much more than helping to spare the blushes of a friend. This miracle heralded and symbolised the beginning of this new age; this kingdom of God.

And this kingdom would be a place where, as the prophet Micah predicts, justice and mercy reign. This kingdom would be a kingdom of joy.

But what exactly is joy?

We struggle, I think, to put it into words. We probably don't have the words, in English at least.

Brené Brown describes joy as 'an intense feeling of deep spiritual connection, pleasure, and appreciation'.

Ask yourself for a moment; when did I last experience joy; that intense feeling of deep spiritual connection, pleasure and appreciation?

Moments perhaps when colours seemed brighter; when smiles arose involuntarily; when we felt ourselves caught up in something bigger; at ease within the flow of life; moments that were perhaps accompanied by tears.

These are not moments in which we lose ourselves, these are the moments in which we find ourselves, when we become more truly ourselves.

Brené Brown again draws a distinction between joy and happiness. 'Happiness,' she says, 'is stable, longer-lasting, and normally the result of effort. It's lower in intensity than joy, she says, and more self-focused. It's a sense of being in control. Unlike joy which is more internal, happiness seems more external and circumstantial.'

Theologian Anne Robertson takes us helpfully back to the Greek origins of these words.

She explains that the Greek word for happiness is 'makarios', which was used to describe the freedom of the rich from normal cares and worries, or to describe a person who received some form of good fortune, such as money or health. Robertson compares this to the Greek word for joy, which is 'chairo'.

Chairo was described by the ancient Greeks as the 'culmination of being' and 'the good mood of the soul'. Robertson writes 'Chairo is something, the ancient Greeks tell us, that is found only in God and comes with virtue and wisdom. It isn't beginner's virtue, it comes as the culmination. They say that its opposite is not sadness, but fear.'

Joy is 'the culmination of being', 'the good mood of the soul'. I love that. And notice that joy isn't the absence of sadness. If you don't believe me, watch Disney Pixar's movie Inside Out. The opposite of joy is fear.

And it is fear that so often lies at the heart of so much of our disease.

Jesus understood that fear lay at the heart of the old religious order. So, another question. Where is fear in your life at the moment?

Fear isn't wrong; fear actually is important. When fear, however, controls our lives, when it steals joy, then it becomes the enemy.

One way of disarming fear is actually through gratitude. Fear takes us on downward spirals, gratitude creates an upward spiral. As Ezra says in the book of Nehemiah, 'The joy of the Lord is your strength'.

Seek out moments of life-giving, life-strengthening joy by cultivating gratitude.

I don't imagine any of us will ever find ourselves miraculously transforming water into claret or sauvignon blanc. We will, however, perform other miracles.

Every time we show, every time we deliberately share in and celebrate each other's joy, rather than the very human and very destructive sin of comparison, we are part of a kingdom coming; a new age where show becomes infectious, where joy grows exponentially.

## John 2

### Jesus Changes Water Into Wine

**2** On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, **2** and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. **3** When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

**4** "Woman,<sup>[a]</sup> why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

**5** His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

**6** Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.<sup>[b]</sup>

**7** Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

**8** Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, **9** and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside **10** and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

**11** What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

**12** After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

## Micah 6 6-8

With what shall I come before the LORD  
and bow down before the exalted God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?

**7** Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

**8** He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly<sup>[a]</sup> with your God