

Marriage at Cana - 20th January 2019

There's seldom a wedding where something doesn't go wrong. To the guest sitting in the pew it may seem perfectly relaxed, with everything in place, but behind the scenes, and usually before the big day itself, there can be all sorts of tensions, anxieties, last minute changes and even arguments. And not all to do with the bride!

One wedding we had was delayed – because the groom's mother hadn't arrived! She lived the other side of the city and had left late anyway because she was getting her hair done. But also she hadn't factored in that that particular day there was a marathon on and a large number of roads were closed. The bride had arrived on time, but sensible girl that she was, decided that she would wait the 40 minutes that it took her future mother-in-law to get to the church. No use starting on the wrong foot if she could avoid it!

Another we waited for the granny of the bride as her wheelchair taxi thought he could squeeze in another job! She was in her 90s and everyone including the bride did a wonderful job pretending nothing was amiss.

Nearly always - something goes wrong. And that was certainly the case in Cana of Galilee. In Jesus' day hospitality was a sacred duty and a wedding was a community event. No mine field of a guest list then as everyone came. For the couple to run out of wine would have been humiliating and something that could not be hidden. It would have been blatantly obvious.

At that time weddings lasted for 7 days and they weren't tame affairs. The Aramaic word for "wedding feast" comes from the same root word as "drink"! Relatives and friends would have come from far and near, and unlike today, as I said the whole community would also join in. There would be feasting and fun, dancing and drinking.

What could possibly go wrong?!

And when the wine ran out Jesus didn't say, "Good! That'll quieten things down. I'll be able to talk now! This lot were having too much fun anyway."

No, he made sure that the celebrations continued. Each water jar contained about 100 litres. Jesus got the servants to fill up 6 of them! Maybe John was exaggerating but Jesus was no kill-joy. As one commentator has written, "I can't imagine Jesus sitting alone with a serious face, talking quietly with just one or two people. Instead, I see him as part of the celebration, singing with everybody else, rejoicing in the festivity." (Jean Vanier)

Jesus was to be found in the local community, in the midst of people, sharing their celebrations and joy.

And it's significant that John records that the first public event where Jesus and his disciples were to be seen was at a community event, and one of celebration.

You would think that Jesus would have wanted to take his new disciples off somewhere quiet to begin their vocational formation – like a desert where there would be no distractions, or a suitably religious place like a synagogue where they would be surrounded by the Scriptures. Even Klopp has taken his players to Dubai!

But where does Jesus take them first of all? To a rowdy do! To be in the midst of the community – there is certainly a lesson there.

Jesus' first miracle was among a crowd of people and that underlines the importance of community in Jesus' eyes.

And it's one of the reasons why being in church and belonging to a church is so important.

You could say that the church is like one of those service stations that you come across regularly on a motorway. Places of refreshment and re-filling.

And also, it's hard to be a Christian on your own. It's easy to slip away from prayer and Bible reading and reflection if we don't join with other people in worship on a regular basis. To stay enthused and encouraged we need community.

And it's not only worshipping together that keeps us going. It's the mutual care, concern, support and encouragement that we get from each other. In times of sickness or trouble we need family around us, and I'm always encouraged when I hear of the kindness and thoughtfulness of St. Peter's people others.

Acts of consideration that don't have to be prompted and that don't get trumpeted – the visits, the offers of help, the company offered both within and without the church, all going to show why community is such a good thing. It's no wonder that in the 1st Letter to Timothy, Paul calls the church God's household, God's family. The Lord's family that gathers around the Lord's Table in the Lord's house on the Lord's day.

And like in Cana of Galilee the church should be fun. Some years ago a Baptist minister, Steve Coffey, looked at the DNA of growing churches and among all the things he found like good leadership, good worship, a warm welcome, children's ministry, he also found that an essential part of a growing church's DNA was a sense of fun.

Church was not a duty but a joy. Members had the ability to celebrate and enjoy themselves. There were smiles and laughter and acceptance rather than frostiness, frowns and criticism.

The church as a community, as a family gives us a sense of continuity. There has been a church in Formby since Norman times.

That gives us a sense of continuity with the past. But what gives us hope for the future is to see the line of children on the mornings we have Sunday Club, coming to the altar full of enthusiasm, assuring us that the church is alive and well. To give children a really good foundation is crucial for their future. For children to feel comfortable and welcomed in St Peter's will be something that will stay with them wherever they go in life.

Now in case I am painting too rosy a picture, like in the community of the human family, so in the community of God's family there will be differences and disagreements.

Today's epistle was part of Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. And perhaps there was no other church that had so many differences and disagreements as the church in Corinth. But Paul urges them to cooperate together, to work with one another, to overcome their divisions – to overcome their own personal agendas and likes and dislikes - for the greater good of God's will for the world. He says that the local church is like a body, not just any body, but the body of Christ and to be effective all the different parts need to pull together, and in the following chapter he gives the key – love. "Love that is patient, love that is kind, not envious or boastful, not arrogant or rude" and so on.

We come to church to show that we love God – and want to reach out to one another.

There is a poem that goes:-

Oh, to be one, to be one in love
With the saints above.
That would be glory!
But to be one down below
With some of the sinners I know –
That's quite a different story!

Church families are like human families – not always easy, but worth it!

In his first public appearance, in his first miracle Jesus celebrated community and commended community. And the community of the church is something we should cherish – a place of love and care, of fun and identity, a place where differences are overcome. A community that welcomes all people in. An open community - an inclusive community. The community of God's church which can then be the community of God's presence in the world around us.

Lastly, according to the American psychiatrist, David Lawson, attending church lowers blood pressure. In a survey he conducted he found that those who went to church often had lower blood pressure than those who went infrequently or not at all.

What more can I say about the benefits of church?!