

Thought for the Day 26th June - John Reed

Read John 2:1-11

Have you tried doing your grocery shopping online during the COVID-19 pandemic?

We have done it that way numerous times – rather than go to the shopping centre, order what you want online and get it delivered to your door. It's very handy. And much safer.

One of the only downsides is that sometimes when they can't find (or, sometimes I suspect, couldn't be bothered looking for!) what you want, they substitute something else. So, on one occasion we ordered broccolini, and got broccoli instead. Another time, we asked for fresh milk and got UHT milk instead. But the best one of all was when we had ordered meat and got apples instead!

Well, this woman in the UK got all upset when the wine she had ordered (a Sauvignon Blanc) was replaced with ... another bottle of wine (also Sauvignon Blanc)! "So what?" you might ask. What's so bad about that? Well, apparently the wine that she got instead was a *lower alcohol* wine!¹ On top of a whole bunch of other stressful things going on in her life, this was the final straw that – in her words - tipped her over the edge.

At the wedding in Cana, Jesus performed the first of his "signs" (verse 11). These signs are miracles that pointed to some deeper truth or message. With many of the other signs later in John's Gospel, the message is clear. The feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1-14) prepares the groundwork for Jesus to say: "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). The raising of Lazarus in chapter 11 is the perfect context for Jesus to say: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). And so on.

But this sign - turning water into wine, and not just any wine, but wine that was better than the other stuff that the bridegroom had bought for his wedding (verse 10) – doesn't lead to any grand statement or claim. There is no "I am the wine of life." So, what is the meaning of this sign?

We are speculating a little here, because Jesus doesn't spell it out for us. But there are a number of possibilities.

First, Jesus makes it clear that he blesses and approves of marriage, by saving what would have otherwise been a disastrous wedding. And maybe this points to him being the bridegroom committing himself to his people, the church (see John 3:29, for example).

Second, in using ceremonial washing jars used for the Jewish rites of purification (verse 6), Jesus points to the fact that he offers a better form of purification than had previously been on offer. Maybe this points us forward to the last supper where the wine represents Jesus' blood and the new covenant (Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 11:25).

¹ <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/weird-news/mum-tipped-over-edge-sees-22239535>

Related to this, there is a rich vein of symbolism in the Old Testament surrounding wine. It represents God's grace and our joy (see for example Deuteronomy 7:1-13; Jeremiah 31:5-12; Psalm 104:15; Isaiah 25:6-9). So, when God blesses us, we can say our cup overflows (Psalm 23:5). And more significantly when he speaks of the coming new covenant, God says: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1), and promises that on that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine and the hills flow with milk (Joel 3:18). Jesus then not only claims that his blood is the wine of the new covenant, but that this new wine cannot be put into the old wineskins of the old Jewish ways (Matthew 9:14-17).

Whether or not they understood all this, what we do know is that the disciples saw Jesus replace the old wine with new, better wine, and saw in this his glory – and as a result they believed in him (verse 11).