

John 1: 29 – 34 & John 2: 1 - 11

I remember back in the 1970's there was a song on the radio called "*Signs*", it was by a group called "*The Five Man Electrical Band*"

Some of the key lines in the song went like this:

"Signs, signs, everywhere there's signs"; or

"And the sign says "You got to have a membership card to get inside""

Frankly it wasn't a very nice song. In fact, putting the swearing aside, it was downright rebellious!

But there was and still is a lot of truth in the two lines I just mentioned to you.

Signs are everywhere and yet, not all signs are on billboards or on the side of the road and in fact not all of them even have words on them.

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As my wife Alison and I travel around the on our patrol in South Western NSW and North Western Victoria, we see many different signs. Some of them are interesting and some of them informative. If you see a sign which tells you a road is open – well you can travel on that road without being fined \$1,000 per tyre. Likewise if you see a sign with just a picture of a kangaroo on it doubtlessly it means "low flying Qantas aircraft in the vicinity"! ... No we just keep an eye out for roos. Bull bars are really useful!

But some people also look at the weather in recent years and how on average the temperature is getting warmer, so to them, they say this is a sign of "global warming". They are begging the world to take notice; and the term "reduce your carbon footprint" is the new mantra around in the press.

So signs are everywhere and although some may be misleading, they take many forms.

Well today, in our readings, there are two signs mentioned, and not one; and neither one of them is misleading. But as we look at them today, I hope you will take notice of the messages they convey.

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But first why have I referred to them as signs?

Well in John's gospel when he speaks of what we call miracles he refers to them as signs. The word for sign used in the original language in, John's gospel, is the word from which we get the word "semaphore".

Semaphores, some of you may remember, were used as a messaging system developed some centuries ago now to send messages. Remember how they used to wave flags around. There is a lady in our congregation in Mildura who actually learned the semaphore alphabet when she served in the Royal Navy in the Second World War. Even now she remembers the letters. Actually Napoleon Bonaparte used semaphores extensively to send messages across Europe during his reign in France before the invention of the telegraph or the radio.

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So just looking at the first sign in our text today (I'll get to the second one later), but it's what John calls the first sign our Lord gave which pointed to something and according to v11, when the disciples witnessed it ... they believed in Him.

So what had happened here? Well as related in our reading from c2 of John's gospel. We know of the event as the miracle at the Wedding feast or the miracle where Jesus changes water into wine.

The text tells us that our Lord together with His disciples, were guests at a wedding and the feast that followed. And sometime into the festivities Mary, our Lord's mother, approached Him and pointed out that they had run out of wine.

Now I'm not going to focus on the repartee between Him and His mother other than to suggest that perhaps to me it appears this may have been a family wedding and not just some of the local yokels, and I say this because otherwise why would the servants have taken notice of Mary have if she wasn't in some way involved – but that's merely conjecture on my part and I don't hold it out as part of the truth of God's word today.

But suffice to say our Lord gives the command to the servants to fill up the ceremonial washing jars which would have been used earlier at the commencement of the feast as people washed themselves in accordance with

the ritual practices required to participate in the feast. Apparently there were 6 jars and John adds the details that they each could contain, in today's measures, between 90 to 135 litres or 20 to 30 gallons, of water i.e. all up there was somewhere between say 550 to 800 litres of water – that's quite a large amount of water to draw from a well or a river, to fill them up, when you think about it.

Anyway, Jesus told the servants to take a sample of the liquid to the MC or the Master of Ceremonies, the guy whose job it was to ensure things went smoothly, and the MC, upon tasting it, turned to the groom and said as recorded in v10, *"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."*

In other words, the MC was being pretty earthy here: he recognised most people brought out the good stuff first and then when everybody was so drunk that they couldn't taste the difference they wheeled out the cheap and nasty 'n stuff. But where the MC is amazed, is that the groom here, has, based on his tastings of the quality, saved the best till last. He had no idea about the events that had transpired. But as the text tells us, the *"servants knew"*.

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But in presenting this sign, Jesus had said nothing. There were no magic words or even words of thanks recorded. The Bible doesn't record Him saying anything other than instructing the servants to firstly fill the jars and secondly to take some to the MC.

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Now those broadly are the facts from our reading from c2.

But today I want to briefly look at both of our readings under 3 headings:

- **Water into wine: our Lord's authority over nature**
- **Saving the best till last**
- **The second signpost**

So my first point: Water into wine: our Lord's authority over nature

Clearly what happened in Cana in Galilee was remarkable.

I don't know how many of you in this room have studied chemistry but what we see here is in actual fact is a mighty miracle – from the perspective of man.

When I studied chemistry at High School many years ago I remember that in order to change something with certain physical or chemical properties to something else, you had to do something to it. You could add or remove heat, you could add other substances or electricity or the like. But you couldn't just put something into a test tube and then moments, later spoon out the contents and expect it to be different! That just didn't happen!

But that's what happened here: Our Lord took simple water, H₂O if you'd like, and without actually saying or doing anything to it at all, other than speaking to the servants, He changed it into a complex carbohydrate called wine – and it wasn't just reconstituted powdered wine; it was the best! The Scripture is so earthy on how it's recognised to be the best, isn't it?

So in this miracle, or this sign, our Lord has demonstrated His authority over nature. And of course we know from elsewhere in Scripture that He did this many times.

He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and raised the dead even.

And sometimes we ask, why did our Lord do these things or why did the Apostle John record the signs he did. Well for those of you who do ask that question you only have to turn to c20 of John's gospel to get the reason why. And the reason he gives there as the purpose for his record of our Lord's ministry is in v31 of that chapter. There it says, *"³¹ But these [the words and the signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*

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Christ had authority over nature and in fact over creation... He is the creator! All things were created by Him and for Him.

So what does the WCF say in c5 regarding God's authority in creation? There it says, *"God... makes use of means, yet [He] is free to work without, above and against [those means], at His pleasure"*.

And what that's saying, is God has authority – he doesn't need our permission or to get authority from us – and he can use the general order of creation to do

things and in fact does, but also he can intervene supernaturally as well; which is exactly what God the Son does here!

The Son here intervened in the creation which He made and sustains, to His own glory. And He did something, which relative to His work of creation, was small, yet in our eyes clearly it was for a purpose. So we have to ask, *“What was He getting at? What was this sign pointing to?”*

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And that brings me to my second point: **Saving the best till last**

You’ll recall our Lord was at this wedding feast by invitation; and so were His disciples. In the last part of c1 which we read this morning, you’ll recall that He had been building His little band of disciples: some were sent by John the Baptist; Peter was brought to him by Andrew, his brother, and still others just followed Him. All up by this time there were 5 disciples or 6 people if you included our Lord here. 6 people, just as there were 6 jars...

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But what we see in this story here are 6 plain earthenware jars. They were baked clay if you’d like. Ordinary clay jars being filled with ordinary water. The ordinary filled with the ordinary. But then in an instant near the end of the feast, the ordinary inside the jars is changed so that when their contents are poured out, the best flows forth.

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Before our Lord walked upon this earth as Messiah, God had sent prophets, priests and kings. He had ordained that His very words would be written down in the Scriptures, the Torah, the prophets and the Psalms; what we know as the Old Testament. But then God sent His best, His eternal Son, the one we know as the Christ, the Lamb of God, the Son of Man, the Son of God – Jesus of Nazareth.

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He is the best and He is the last, He took on flesh. He became as it were “the new Adam” He became a man made out of the earth that He Himself created... He was born of a woman. He became like an earthenware jar. And yet from this earthenware He pours Himself out. He poured out His life unto death. He

poured out of Himself, as a man yes God/man, but a man nevertheless. He came to do what a man born into original sin could not do. He poured out His life sinlessly – without blemish – in obedience to His Father. Out of the body of a man God poured out the best in the last days.

Yet the teaching doesn't end there!

The disciples: Sinful ordinary men; There was nothing in them that was remarkable. They were all sons of Adam; sons of the earth ... or clay jars. Yet our Lord taught them, instructed them and even filled them with the Spirit and they too were to be poured out as well. The ordinary were filled and were to pour out on this fallen world the best news that it had ever heard:

And what is that news? ... Christ Jesus Saves.

Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God has paid the price for your sins, so turn away from your sins and believe in Him and you will be saved.

Jesus Christ is still even now calling on ordinary folk like you and I. And He is saying, *"Come to me – I will fill you and then I will pour you out"*. What will come out of you will be hope eternal for those who hear and believe your words.

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But now for my third point and you will recall I said there were 2 signs mentioned in our reading today: so now **the second sign or signpost...**

Firstly, we have already seen the sign or the pointer that Christ gave of Himself that He will pour out of Himself and indeed pour out Himself from others as well. But now we look to the man John the Baptist...

I put it to you that John the Baptist became a living sign or sign post.

When you look at a sign post on the roads many point the way to places where you can go. And John the Baptist is pointing the way in our text today. C1:10 says, *"²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"*

Was he physically extending an arm and pointing out our Lord? I don't know, but in my mind's eye I imagine a man looking a bit wild and unkempt physically pointing out our Lord.

John's cry was saying so much: Christ Jesus is the lamb God provided, who was the substitute for Abraham's son Isaac. You'll recall in Genesis c22 how Abraham had faith and even though God challenged him to sacrifice his son, he was so confident in God's provision that he could actually say to his son, "**God himself will provide the lamb ...**"

Well John, the Signpost; John the Baptist, pointed out to all who were listening at the Jordan River that day that God had now fulfilled His promise to Abraham. God had given His own Son, whom He loved, in place of Abraham's son ... in our place ... because He so loved the world and the world needed a perfect sacrifice.

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But the story cannot end there.

I am here today as a Presbyterian Inland Missionary. And what both my wife Alison and I are is signposts. We seek to point out the Way, the Truth and the Life ... to those in the outback and in isolated communities.

We knock on doors, we help on the land and laugh with those who laugh and cry with those who cry – just so we can point people to the Lord Jesus Christ.

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But isn't that what we all are called on to do, to be signposts ... and yet also to pour out of ourselves what Christ has given us. Are we not all, as disciples, called on to go and share the love of Christ with our neighbours, our friends and yes those we don't know whether here or across the world.

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You know, as I close I am reminded of the second prayer our Lord instructed His disciples to pray. We all remember the first prayer He taught; we call it the Lord's Prayer. But there is a second prayer and He actually commanded the disciples to pray it.

It's in Matthew 9: 37 and 38. Let me read it to you from the ESV version:

³⁷ Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest."

...

If we look at the true richness of the original language there, we see our Lord actually commanding the disciples to ask earnestly or plead with the Lord of the harvest to throw, like a ball, people or workers, into the harvest field: For the harvest is great and the workers are few...

Will you join us few workers like your minister, like your Session, like the other missionaries you support ... Will you join us in the harvest field as signposts, pointing others to Christ, will you join us as jars of clay being poured out to the glory of God?

Signs, signs – there actually aren't enough to be everywhere... we need more signposts...