

Church at home

East Leake Methodist Church 2021

Sit comfortably in a quiet place and prepare, start with a brief period of silence, turning your mind and spirit towards God. You may want to have a cross or candle in view as a focus.

❖ Call to Worship

Almighty God,
we worship you, knowing that you are with us,
concerned about each one of us,
waiting to speak your word,
ready to forgive, bless and lead us.

We come in faith:
meet with us now.

So now we bring you our songs
and our reading of your word,
our thinking and listening,
our praying and praising.
We bring the fellowship we share,
the discipleship we offer,
the world we belong to,
and the lives you have given us.

We come in faith:
meet with us now.

Open our eyes and our hearts to your presence,
and teach us, through all that we do this day,
to be your children,
your disciples,
your Church,
your people.

We come in faith:
meet with us now.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

❖ Hymn StF 83 Praise, my soul, the King of heaven (Praise my soul)

- 1 Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
to his feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven
who like thee his praise should sing?
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise the everlasting King!
- 2 Praise him for his grace and favour
to his people in distress;
praise him, still the same for ever,
slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise him! Praise him!
Glorious in his faithfulness!
- 3 Father-like, he tends and spares us;
well our feeble frame he knows;
in his hands he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him! Praise him!
Widely as his mercy flows.
- 4 Angels in the height, adore him;
ye behold him face to face;
sun and moon, bow down before him,
dwellers all in time and space.
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise with us the God of grace!

❖ Prayer of Approach

Leader Holy Spirit,
gift of the Father through his Son, Jesus Christ,
dwell in us all, open our hearts
and help us to listen to your voice.

All **Holy Spirit, come upon us.**

Leader Holy Spirit, Divine Love,
source of unity and holiness,
show us the love of God.

All **Holy Spirit, come upon us.**

Leader Holy Spirit, Fire of Love,
purify us, removing all divisions
in our hearts, in our communities and in the world,
and so make us one in Jesus' name.

All **Holy Spirit, come upon us.**

Leader Holy Spirit,
strengthen our faith in Jesus,

truly divine and truly human,
who carried our sins of division to the Cross
and brought us to communion in his Resurrection.

All **Holy Spirit, come upon us.**

Leader Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
dwell in us
that we may become a communion of love and holiness.
Make us one in you,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

All **Amen.**

❖ Prayer of Confession

Leader God invites us to reconciliation and holiness.

Let us turn our minds, hearts and bodies to receive the grace of
reconciliation on the way to holiness.

Silence

Leader Lord, you created us in your own image.
Forgive us when we do not honour your image in us
and the world that you gave us.
Kyrie eleison.

All **Kyrie eleison.**

Leader Jesus, you invite us to be perfect
as our heavenly Father is perfect.
Forgive us when we fail to be holy,
to be people of integrity
and to respect human rights and dignity.
Christe eleison.

All **Christe eleison.**

Leader Lord of life, not of death
of peace, not of war
of light, not of darkness
forgive us when we become instruments of war,
death and injustice
and fail to build a community of love.
Kyrie eleison.

All **Kyrie eleison.**

Leader Merciful God,
fill us with your grace and holiness.
Make us apostles of love wherever we go.
This we pray through Christ, our Lord.

All **Amen.**

❖ Gospel John 2:1-11

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, 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 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."

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.

❖ Hymn StF 157 God has spoken – by his prophets (Hyfrydol)

- 1 God has spoken-by his prophets,
spoken his unchanging word;
each from age to age proclaiming
God, the one, the righteous Lord.
'Mid the world's despair and turmoil
one firm anchor holding fast:
God eternal reigns forever,
God the first, and God the last.
- 2 God has spoken-by Christ Jesus,
Christ, the everlasting Son,
brightness of the Father's glory,
with the Father ever one;
spoken by the Word incarnate,
God from God, ere time was born;
light from light, to earth descending,
Christ, revealing God to all
- 3 God is speaking-by the Spirit,
speaking to our hearts again,
in the age-long word expounding
God's own message, now as then.
Through the rise and fall of nations
one sure faith is standing fast;
God still speaks, the word unchanging,
God the first, and God the last.

❖ Sermon – Wedding at Cana

A telephone call:

“Hello, this is Cana Catering. Oh, hello Mrs Levi how is the wedding going? Good, good. I'm pleased to hear it. Yes, I know that she's your only daughter so it's important to get it right. So glad it's going well. Oh, I see. The on-site manager wants to talk to me. Okay, put him on.

Hello Jacob. How are things? I see, you've got a problem. Well, what is it? It's about the wine? They started to run out, oh, I see. Well, Jacob, you know what to do. Just send somebody out to the wine merchant and restock. Mrs Levi can easily afford it and as it is her only daughter's wedding but I'm sure they'll be no problem in paying for it. I told when she ordered the original quantity that the folk from Nazareth guzzle like mad at a wedding feast, but she would have her own way.

I see, that's not the problem. You've got enough wine already. Well, Jacob, why are you calling me? I see, it's about the extra wine. I'm not sure I follow this, Jacob. You've got extra wine, haven't you? How much! You've gone out and bought 180 gallons of wine! Jacob, you must be out of your mind! What possessed you to buy 180 gallons of wine? There's no way they'll shift that not even if they stay there for a month. Even if the whole of Cana turned up to the wedding, they wouldn't drink their way through 180 gallons. I see, you didn't buy the wine. A guest brought it. Well what did he come with? a camel train laden with wineskins! He made it. Well, Jacob, where did he make it? At the wedding. I'm not sure I quite get this Jacob. You're telling me that a guest turned up to the wedding and made 180 gallons of wine on the spot, using the water jars. Jacob, have you been drinking? How much have you had? Okay, okay so you're stone cold sober, but frankly I can't believe a tale like that.

Well, I don't know what you're going to do with all the extra wine. Well, it may be very good, but we're certainly not buying it into stock here. There's no way I could shift that quantity even with the commitments we've got. I've got three bar mitzvahs coming up, but they couldn't shift that lot if they tried. It'll go sour in the warehouse if we take it into stock.

I see, that's not your problem. Well I quite agree it isn't your problem, Jacob. If the guest has turned up with that amount of wine that it's the guest's problem to try and dispose of it afterwards. There's no reason for you to get involved. OK, you know that! Look, Jacob, why are you calling me? What's the problem? Ah, I see, you haven't got anything to wash up with!”

Okay, so it's a slightly tongue in cheek interpretation of the tale. But the owner of Cana Catering has hit the main point. It's that sheer quantity of wine has been produced. Now that everybody has now gone metric, so let me do a little conversion of those quantities into something we could better understand. 180 gallons is 900 L of wine. That's the equivalent of 1200 bottles. Basically, if everyone in our usual congregation took 6 cases of wine home with them you would just about shift 180 gallons. Now a wedding feast during those days could last up to a week. But I guess that you couldn't drink the best part of a case of wine a day for a week on your own.

When Jesus performed this miracle, he showed that God not only gave things that people needed at the time, but God was willing to give in abundance, more than enough, and enough for everyone. But there is much more to the story than this. John's gospel has seven signs which indicate who Jesus was, and practically every one of them operates on multiple levels – not only a simple conclusion, but some of the detail of the story indicates deeper levels which help us to understand Jesus's ministry both then and now. The miracle of the wedding in Cana of Galilee is just such a story. As we investigate it in more depth it helps us to understand that curious exchange that Jesus had with Mary, her response, and why Jesus is so keen on keeping the miracle a secret – even from the steward who is responsible for the food & drink.

To understand a bit more about this miracle we need briefly to look at the situation in Israel at that time. There was a long-standing belief in the Jewish faith that God had made an agreement – a covenant – in which he had promised that they would be the pre-eminent nation – God's people – and that he would give them their own land – the Promised Land. In return the people would worship God alone and would obey the commands that he gave to keep them within the covenant. When the Jewish people were exiled away from the Promised Land by the neo-Babylonians the Jews understood that this was because they had failed to live up to God's standards. They also began to understand that God was not simply a tribal god of the Jews but was universal God of all. When the Persians overthrew the Babylonians, the Jewish people were returned to their homeland, but they did not achieve the expected political independence. Nor did they when the Persians were overthrown in their turn by Alexander the Great. They remained under Greek rule, even when Alexander had died, under the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. There was a brief period of semi-independence under the Hasmonean dynasty, but this was ended when Herod the Great overthrew the Hasmoneans and betrayed the Jewish people to the Romans under a deal with Pompey whereby he was recognised as "King of the Jews" and the Romans became the rulers of Israel with the Herodians as a client state. When Herod died his kingdom was split between his three sons, including Herod Antipas – the Herod of Jesus's time. The Herodians were a dysfunctional family constantly feuding with each other, and one of the results of this feuding was that the Romans decided to go for direct rule over the Judah rather than have the sons of Herod as client rulers. In the early first century A.D. the Jewish state seethed with frustration – and questioned how the promises of God would be fulfilled for them so that they would become a top nation and they would have their own political state. They expected that God would send a Messiah, who would reunite the political and religious state together as "prophet, priest, and king". The Messiah would be the one to throw out the hated Romans and the family of Herod that cooperated with them.

The battle for the political soul of the Jews will ultimately result in a rebellion in A.D. 66 against the Romans. The rebellion came at a time when the Roman state itself was in disarray and initially there was some success, but after the Romans had sorted themselves out they suppressed the rebellion violently – destroying Jerusalem and its Temple in A.D. 70 and finally dealing with the last remnants of resistance at Masada in the desert in A.D. 74. Whilst all this was bubbling up to rebellion there was also a struggle for the spiritual soul of the Jewish people. Three groups were principally involved. Two of them – the Pharisees and the Sadducees – we meet in the New Testament as each group challenges Jesus and eventually a collaboration between them sees Jesus betrayed, arrested, and executed. The

Sadducees who claimed to be descendants of Zadok the Priest (hence their name) represented the priestly party, who believed that the Jewish people could be made right with God by respecting the laws of Moses about sacrifice and observance of Temple worship. However, by the time of Jesus this priestly group had become corrupt. Instead of the hereditary priests set out in the Mosaic Law, the high priesthood had effectively become a franchise. Caiaphas and Ananias, High Priests at this time, purchased the high priesthood as the highest bidder. They ran rackets of the Temple tax, sale of sacrificial animals, and money changing which was highly profitable. To remain in their position they openly collaborated with the Romans. Many pious Jews despised them, and instead turned to the Pharisees – who were based in the community and were ultra-observant Jews, critical of those who could not keep up to their high standards, but who are also branded as hypocrites because whilst keeping every single small part of the Law they had lost the compassion and understanding that lay behind it. But the Pharisees also ran the synagogues dispersed throughout the Jewish nation and taught Jewish Law through local rabbis (the name means “teacher”), and when the Temple was destroyed it was their arrangements of synagogue and rabbis that sustained the Jewish people through long years of dispersal across the world.

There was another group – the Essenes. We didn't know much about these people, and what we did know was derived from the writings of the Jewish author Josephus. Josephus was involved in the Jewish revolt and was a leader in Galilee. But seeing which way things were going as the Romans began to organise themselves, he became a turncoat and betrayed his people. He wrote two books “Jewish Antiquities” and “The Jewish War” in which he tried to curry favour with his new masters. He is not entirely reliable as a witness, but he tells us that the Essenes were rather like a monastic community that lived in the desert at Qumran and wanted to separate themselves completely from the political and spiritual mess that existed in first century Israel. Subsequently we began to understand much more about the Essenes when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered which came essentially from the Essene community. One thing we know about them is that they were deeply misogynistic. Only men could join the Essene sect, and their scripture varied from the traditional Jewish scripture of the time by deliberately missing out those sections that related to women – such as the Book of Ruth and the Book of Esther. But the problem with a male only monastic type community is its survival long-term! So the Essenes developed sub- groupings within them where they lived in the community rather than in desert places, and they would marry, but only with the objective of ensuring that there were sufficient children to be brought up in the Essene way of life. The key Essene doctrine was purity – and they achieve this by ritual washing sometimes several times during the day.

It's this new insight which gives us a deeper understanding of that wedding at Cana – for almost certainly the household was Essene. No normal house would retain 180 gallons of water simply to fulfil the requirements of hospitality in washing the feet and hands of a stranger who came to stay. We are told by John that this water was used for ritual purposes – way beyond the requirements of hospitality, and that it was kept in stone jars. Any normal Jewish household would have kept the water that they drew in pottery jars, because stone jars were not only more difficult to make but also much more expensive. The fact that this household has six stone jars, which the Essenes insisted on because they were ritually pure in their eyes, rather than pottery jars, almost certainly indicates that this was an Essene household. This is not the only time that Jesus interacts with the Essene

community. When Jesus tells his disciples to “make preparations” for the Last Supper, he tells them to go to a certain part of Jerusalem and there to follow young man who is carrying a jar of water on his head. Now you might think disciples might have picked on anyone carrying out this simple routine daily task. However the key is that it is a young man who is carrying the water – and this was a job which was “gender designated” as anthropologists would put it – it was a job for women. The fact that the young man is carrying water means that almost certainly he was part of an Essene community that met in that part of town and was predominantly a male only society. So the young man had to do what the women would normally do.

So if this is an Essene wedding, what do we make of Jesus’ exchange with his mother? What we know is that Jesus knew that his message and ministry would promote conflict with the corrupt Sadducees, with the “holier than thou” Pharisees, and his insistence on working with all people, and especially his acceptance of groups of women into his entourage would have been anathema to the Essenes. When Jesus changes the water into wine, he is effectively saying that the old wine of the traditional spiritual groups in Israel is now exhausted. God won’t be listening to the traditionalists of the Sadducees, or to the fundamentalist attitude of the Pharisees, or to the separatist Essenes. What he brings forward is new wine, better wine, something vastly different. Conflict is almost inevitable as these religious groups cling to their interpretation of God’s will clashes with Jesus’ universal declaration of the Kingdom of God and the need for all to repent and believe. But in being pushed into this miracle which, if it became widely known would be seen as a sign from God – because the idea that God was the bridegroom of Israel, and the idea of the great wedding feast was commonplace as a metaphor for the kingdom of God (Jesus uses it several times in his parables) – would promote conflict before Jesus had an opportunity to declare his message.

The photographer Henri Cartier Bresson used to say that the art of photography was to be able to press the shutter at the “decisive moment”, and that if you did you would capture in your photograph the very essence of something greater than just its image. Jesus knows that his decisive moment will come, but not yet. So he carries out the miracle in secret. Only the servants – the lowest of the low in the household – are aware of what he has done. The bridegroom and the steward are in ignorance. John sees this as a key sign of the truth which he has expressed in his opening chapter when he describes how Jesus came to his own and his own did not recognise him or acknowledge him.

So much more is going on here than simply appears on the surface. What does it tell us? Perhaps that the certainty of religious traditionalists that they are obeying the will of God by maintaining the set forms of worship, particularly when it is driven by human status and ambition rather than bringing in God’s kingdom is misplaced. Perhaps it tells us that strict fundamentalists who keep the detail of every religious observance but who have lost sight of the purpose, compassion and universal love of God is misplaced. Perhaps it tells us that those who would separate themselves from the world to establish their own sense of purity rather than get involved in the messy business of social and political change is misplaced. Perhaps it would remind us that Jesus brings something new, and that God will do something new, and being open to that is to align yourself with God’s will. Then at some time in our long pilgrimage through life then there will be decisive moments when we choose to drink the new wine that is provided in such abundance by loving God and make something new happen.

❖ Prayer/Meditation

May your presence draw people across the world
and reveal your mother heart of compassion.
Pour into the empty cups of the world
the beauty and blessings of Christ
and gather together your children.

❖ Hymn StF 603 Come to a wedding, come to a blessing (Bunessan) (v1-3)

- 1 Come to a wedding, come to a blessing,
come on a day when happiness sings!
come rain or sun, come winter or summer,
celebrate love and all that it brings.
- 2 Thanks for the love that holds us together -
parent and child, and lover and friend:
thanks to the God whose love is our centre,
source of compassion, knowing no end.
- 3 Love is the gift, and love is the giver,
love is the gold that makes the day shine,
love forgets self to care for the other,
love changes life from water to wine.

❖ Prayers of Intercession

Leader As God's adopted children,
aware of our call to mission,
let us raise our prayers
and affirm our desire to be a holy people of God.

Silence

Leader Gracious God,
transform our hearts,
our families,
our communities and our society.

All **Make all your people holy and one in Christ.**

Leader Water of life,
quench the thirst that exists in our society,
the thirst for dignity, for love,
for communion and holiness.

All **Make all your people holy and one in Christ.**

Leader Holy Spirit,
Spirit of joy and peace,
heal the divisions caused by our misuse of power and money,
and reconcile us across different cultures and languages.
Unite us as God's children.

All **Make all your people holy and one in Christ.**

Leader Trinity of love,
lead us out of darkness into your marvellous light.

All **Make all your people holy and one in Christ.**

Leader Lord Jesus Christ,
we are made one with you in baptism
and therefore we unite our prayers to yours
in the words you taught us.

❖ The Lords Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

❖ Hymn StF 664 Lord you call us to your service (Angel Voices)

- 1 Lord, you call us to your service,
each in our own way.
Some to caring, loving, healing;
some to preach, or pray;
some to work with quiet learning,
truth discerning,
day by day.
- 2 Life for us is always changing
in the work we share.
Christian love adds new dimensions
to the way we care.
For we know that you could lead us,
as you need us,
anywhere.
- 3 Seeing life from your perspective
makes your challenge plain,
as your heart is grieving over
those who live in pain.
Teach us how, by our compassion,
we may fashion
hope again.

4 Lord, we set our human limits
on the work we do.
Send us your directing Spirit,
pour your power through,
that we may be free in living
and in giving
all for you.

❖ Blessing

We have listened to the Holy Word of God which we honour and treasure,
We will carry this Word out into the world,
For we are joined in one mission,
To be Salt of the Earth, to be Light to the World,
And to proclaim the Lord's mighty acts.

And the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
who blesses the poor,
 those who mourn,
 the meek,
 the merciful,
 the pure in heart,
 the peacemakers,
 and the persecuted,
be upon you and remain with you always.

Amen