

**“Tasting New Life” a sermon based on John 2: 1-11 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on the second Sunday of Epiphany, 17 January 2016.**

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, things run out.

“Dear, I don’t know how to say this. The spark seems to have gone from our marriage. Our love isn’t what it used to be. We don’t seem to enjoy each other the way we used to. It feels cold.”

“What do you mean?”

Or ...

“Work isn’t what it used to be. When our new boss came, we were drawn in, engaged, involved, all participating, but now the organisation has grown, there are more people, we don’t know what is going on. We have become distant from each other, less trusting, less engaged. I don’t feel involved now.”

I’ve heard that one.

Or

“He used to be passionate, engaging, but, I don’t know, the light has gone out. The words are good and noble, but the heart seems empty. The same things are being said, but the spirit has gone. He seems like an empty shell.”

I’ve seen that happen.

Or

“In any economy, there will always be some people left behind, at the edge, where economic wellbeing runs out. If we are to have a growing economy, we need wealthy people with capital, and we need to enable them to invest their capital for the wellbeing of others, but there will always be those at the other end of the line where the money dribbles out.”

I’ve heard that one.

Kate Tempest has these words one of our members sent me ...

*“To really see the state of things is lethal*

*It's safer just to see what we can bear.”*

Mary sees the state of things and speaks. She is the truth teller. Only a guest, she had the audacity to say “They have no wine.”

The emperor has no clothes. Things have run out.

She wasn't thanked for doing so.

Her son reacted. "Woman" he called her, disrespectfully.

"Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?"

"Push off. I don't want to know. Not now. It's not time."

Just let things be, keep quiet, keep your distance, stand apart.

It's less trouble, less risky.

She, they, could simply have accepted that the wine had run out, lived with it, got over it – that's how it is with parties, people, organisations, churches.

"So, the wine has run out. O well."

When organisations become focused on resources they don't have, they have already given up. It could be a rule.

When bodies become directed by their lack of this or their lack of that, when they become consumed by things running out – people, spirit, love, justice, money – when that comes to rule them, the downward pull becomes impossible to withstand.

Because they have turned their focus from what they exist for, from who they are called to be, from who they might be, from the possibilities and potential and gifts that are there.

The emotion becomes luke-warm. People feel trapped.

Mary though, and we don't know why, had a taste for something more, a thirst for the good life.

Hospitality, festivity, conversation, life, joy, colour, spirit.

What was it about Mary that she believed something more was possible, and that she had the courage to question her son, and to persevere despite his rebuke of her, his resistance to her comments?

Whatever it was, she turned Jesus around, and he turned to what was there, in front of them.

"Standing there were six stone jars ..." for purification.

Miroslav Volf - "Show me a bored person, and most likely it will be a person who hasn't yet learned the art of paying attention."

Jars valued for one purpose; waiting to be turned for another.

Empty jars they filled to overflowing with water.

Tradition gained new purpose and fresh life.

It happens again and again.

New life comes when organisations rediscover their purpose, regain their essence, remember their original genius and reform around it. They are brought to life by a deeper dynamic and no longer argue things must be done this way or that way, by limited and limiting choices. Now there are new options people never considered.

It sometimes happens that when marriages become tired, people rediscover each other, the beauty of the other. In the patience that kept them together they find a fragile flame and it is enough. When fanned, they enter into a fresh love. They pay attention to each other and listen to each other again.

We see in Dunedin how cities and towns, where buildings have become old and tired, buildings finding a new purpose and new life.

When people in church talk about what they cherish, what motivates them, when they risk the language of faith, when they go beyond likes and dislikes, when they go deeper to what we exist for, to what is in the heart, the deeper dynamic, new life comes.

And perhaps there is an economic way of being where there is not a group at the end of the line where things dribble out?

In the story, nowhere does it say Jesus turned the water into wine.

Its less direct than that, more surreptitious, behind the scene, behind the seen.

Looking on, we would only see people conversing with Jesus. That's all he did, converse with the people who were there, giving directions.

"Fill the jars with water. Draw some out. Take it to the chief steward."

Somewhere amid that conversation, water became wine. Somewhere, amid ordinary party-going people, with Jesus in the room, in conversation, somewhere in that water became wine.

It came from the actions of the people, from their attention to his words.

He did not say, abracadabra, and whoof!

He did not say, now watch this folks, and everyone looked.

His glory was revealed behind the scenes, and people needed to listen and attend in order to notice it, because it was not obvious, not clear, not in their face.

It was all done through interaction with ordinary people, at a party, with Christ.

In her book on listening, Lynne Baab<sup>i</sup> points out that the root of the word “listening” lies in two anglo-saxon words that mean “hearing” and “to wait in suspense”.

Mary was one who waited in suspense. We heard that a few Sundays ago.

Listening involves paying attention and waiting in suspense. It is my privilege as a minister to listen to stories. I wish you could hear them, the experience, the testing, the trying, the struggles, the hopes, the failing, the success, the joy, water becoming wine, behind the scene.

The people Isaiah addressed had returned from exile but life was less than they had expected. They were a people forsaken, desolate. They needed to learn how to live in a new land, to be a new people, amid disappointment.

The prophet said, no longer will you be called forsaken or desolate - “You shall be called “My delight is in her”.

The people of Corinth - gifted, talented, accomplished - competed with each other for attention, for which gift was the most important, which person needed to be acknowledge. Yes, said Paul, many gifts, varieties of gifts, and they all came from the same Spirit, the same Lord.

He called them deeper.

Water became wine. More wine than they needed, more than they imagined, more than they could drink.

So what do we have? Not luke-warm, extravagant. Not hand to mouth, abundant. Not getting by, overwhelming. There was a lot of wine, gallons of it, litres of it.

We aren’t told how the party ended. Fortunately we aren’t left with a picture of the morning after. We are left with a taste in our mouth, the taste of good wine.

That taste of justice flowing. That taste of deep joy. That taste of relationships restored. That taste of creation healed. That taste of hope that life can be good for people. The taste of good wine.

Prayer – In this moment, touch our taste buds and refresh our taste for your life in us, in our church, in our city, in our economy, in all of creation. Keep us thirsting, conversing, noticing, partying, in grace. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Baab, L.M. 2014 The Power of Listening – Building Skills for Mission and Ministry, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland