

Sermon Archive 520

Sunday 26 January, 2025

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch
Reflections on the Wedding in Cana
and the turning of water into wine
Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Introduction: The Wedding Roll Call

On the front page of the order of service, you'll find a family photo of a wedding reception, held on 12 May 1965.



From left to right.

- Great Uncle King - who had gaps between his teeth that allowed him to whistle bird song. Early in his marriage, he considered leaving his wife, but made the mistake of sharing his plans with his mother-in-law. He spent the rest of his life being dutifully present - and he whistled.

- Uncle Peter, who thought I spent too much time in my pyjamas. He tended to voice his feelings about such things. The voicing of avuncular opinion can be helpful. It can also be scary. At his funeral, I confessed to having been frightened of him - not all the time.
- Below, cousin Michael, who, under his father's tutelage spent only appropriate time in his pyjamas. At another family funeral, he described his father as a "pretty tough character".
- Woman in furry hat - Mum, the person who in years to come would become the matriarch of the remnants of this group. Recently, when quizzed on why she was both old and happy, she went on record as saying that from the beginning of her life until now, she had always been loved, and always had known it. Never any doubt - the longevity benefits of love.
- Woman in hat peering over Mum's shoulder, Great Aunty Sybil, who had the capacity to come for afternoon tea and stay for two months. Look out for Sybil! Lost a breast and several toes. Never however lost her husband. Was she pleased that he was persuaded to stay? It's probably best when love is reciprocated.
- Standing sideways - Aunty Madeline - wasn't focused on her private education as a teenager, but now reads and researches and does speeches on anything and everything. In a way, she's kind of "come to life" since the death of her husband. The absence of one kind of love from her world has stimulated the growth of another kind. Not sure what *her* thoughts are concerning how long teenagers should spend in their pyjamas. She hasn't seen fit to voice a policy.
- At the back, my father, a good man, probably wondering what on earth he's doing in this group of people. Crossed the world for love, and in order to escape the troubles (social, religious, economic) of Northern Ireland. He's the closest thing, I guess, that this group has to a refugee. Freedom requires work, and love requires movement.
- Little girl at the front, cousin Julie, paralysed in a motor accident at 20, represented New Zealand in the Paralympics (so an overcomer of circumstances). Unhappy first marriage, loving but short second

marriage. Fight for love, Julie! Funeral conducted by cousin Matthew in 2016.

- Behind, the groom, Tim, insurance, calm, good - wore a suit. Some people, when dragging on a cigarette, make those almost kissing sounds. Maybe smoke helped him keep calm. Doesn't smoke anymore. Maybe doesn't need to - has he settled into life?
- The bride, Diana - took care of young Matthew when his mother was in hospital, giving birth to his sister, and again when Matthew moved to Dunedin and home-sickly needed a warm and familiar mothering figure. A very nurturing, loyal person with lots of love to give.
- In between bride and groom, from the back, Uncle David, run over by a car when he was three - landed on his head, but got on with life anyway. He attended a number of weddings - and I think found the first few ones for his nieces and nephews a bit difficult. It felt, maybe, like younger generations were queue-jumping to the altar. What had happened to *his* wedding?
- To the right of him, his brother, Andrew, physiotherapist - urban man who dreamed of having a farm, so got one. He's an old man now, surveying the hills of Leigh, enjoying distance from the city and the noise of people. To the frustration of his wife, as he became more and more deaf, he resisted the fitting of hearing aids. Infuriatingly, it was almost as if he preferred not being part of conversations.
- Then Averill, matriarch of the group (accused of baby farming, guilty of being sufficiently chaotic in her book-keeping to cause suspicion that she was baby farming). Resented to this day by some of her children for being too busy to love them properly. By other of her children, celebrated for her love. So love's not a simple thing to read, it would seem.
- Then John, Averill's witty, charming, ladies'-man husband, very intelligent, enjoyed whisky. The situation was both complicated and simple. Of all of us, he probably had the greatest need for a wine-related miracle.
- Then Gaenor, the posh aunt from St Heliers, whose face and way of laughing is very much still present in her eldest daughter - those

we nurture in love, grow in our image. The thumb-print of love. I couldn't take Gaenor's funeral because I got Covid and had to isolate. Sometimes the bonds of family love meet pandemics and get defeated.

That messy group of white, middle-class heterosexual people gathered for a wedding - to celebrate a love that had flourished in their midst. With all its hang-ups, quirks and dysfunctions, the community gathered to honour love. None of them were experts in love - but they gathered anyway. Love bade them come. We'll think about that some more . . .

Hymn: Who is my mother?

Lesson: John 2:1-11

Music for Reflection

Reflection: Who wants to get married?

In 1986, when Fran Wilde was shepherding the Marriage Equality Bill through the select committee process at parliament, part of the rainbow community was right behind her. Huge was the yearning from many to be able to be equal in the eyes of the law to have and to hold, to love, honour and cherish - just as their non-rainbow brothers and sisters had been. And indeed, part of the desire of part of the community formed through occasions when unmarried partners were locked out of decision making when next-of-kin were consulted, for instance, about end-of-life decisions being made in hospitals. Legal recognition of relationship status was something some people hoped Fran would deliver.

Other members of the community, though, weren't all that fussed about marriage. They reckoned that civil unions provided what they needed legally - AND - they also reckoned they didn't want to buy into an institution that came with traditional roles and stereotypes. They reckoned that they could do better, freer, more bespoke in integrity, than old-fashioned "man and wife". They noted that since 1971, when marriage numbers peaked in this country at 27,201, even straight couples were moving away from "getting married". In

1986, the numbers had fallen to 24,036. Last year, the numbers were at 18,744.

So, who wants to get married? Around that question, here are one or two things I have heard.

Hilary and Ross loved each other very much and had been together for a long time. Every couple of months, Ross would ask Hilary to marry him. Hilary kept saying "no", because her first marriage had been such a horrible experience. She loved Ross totally - and didn't want to drag into their love all the baggage she still felt she carried. Why import the shadows? One day Ross asked her one time too often. She caved in, said "yes". Seemingly, quietly in the background, some process of grace had been ticking over, whereby Hilary had managed to set down the baggage. Twenty years since I heard their vows, Hilary and Ross are happily married.

Another couple had been together for a long time, and had never felt the need to marry. I think they shared a mortgage, so the bank had obviously been happy enough with their status to have given them shared debt. I seem to recall that part of the marriage patter was "it's only a piece of paper". But suddenly, a wedding was being planned. The reason cited was that a child was about to be born, and this somehow made a difference. "For the sake of the children . . ." The bank was happy, but there was a perception that the child mightn't have been. So, they married. Clearly it wasn't just a piece of paper. And as far as I know, they're still together.

Another couple was very young - so young, in fact, that they required the permission of their parents to marry. I suspect, as I look back on them now, that they were very keen to have sex, but felt they couldn't until they married. They made lots of noise about being mature, old enough to make solemn commitments. In terms of commitments, they failed to pay the minister, and they giggled all the way through the service. Why **do** we get married?

Another couple were riding a wave of support and encouragement from their traditional Malaysian families, who were keen for a wedding. It's good when families support a couple. It seemed to me, as I read the situation from my closeted closet, that the groom

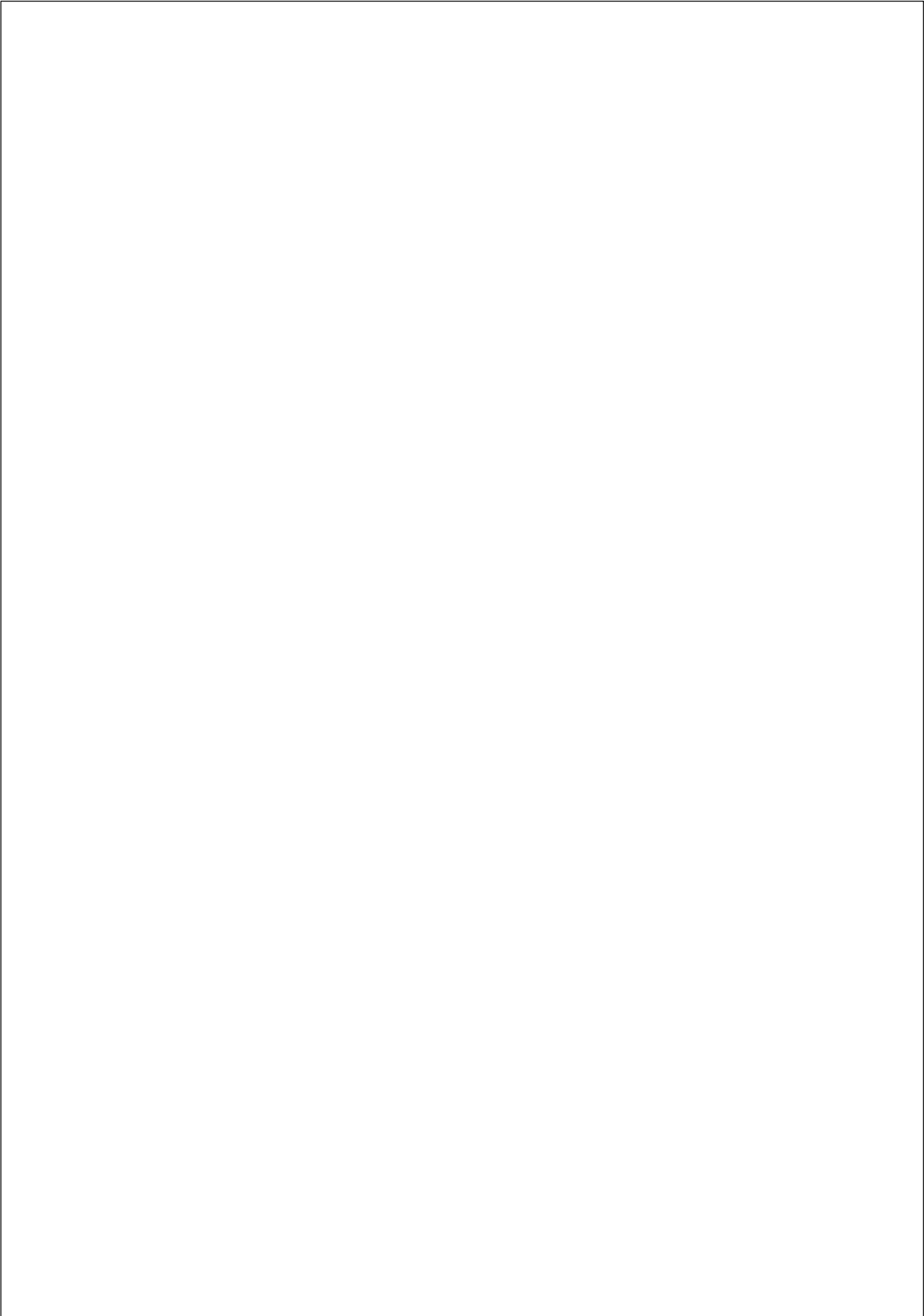
was gay. I wondered how that would go, but I lacked the courage to broach that subject. Why do we marry?

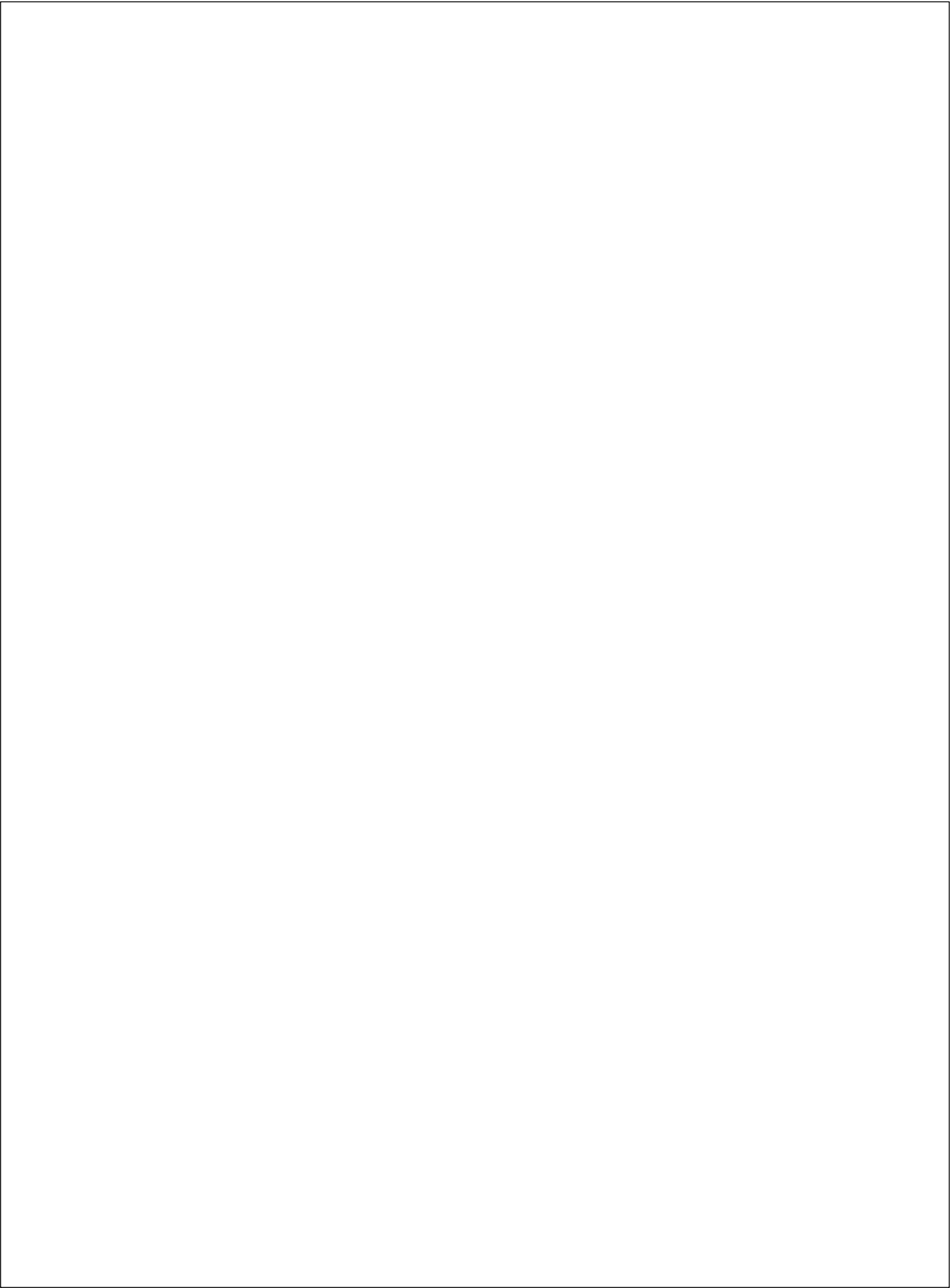
It seems that we marry (or don't) for many reasons. The purpose of introducing you to every person in the wedding photo from 1965 was to illustrate that weddings are full of people (the bridal party **and** the guests) who are messy and complicated - people for whom love is natural, but challenging. We all carry baggage, and have stories, and tangled bits of string. We're not prime contenders for love.

Yet still, when we find love among us, we go to lengths to celebrate - to sing and dance, to speak and vow, to hold hands and say "amen", to raise our glasses and drink our wine - when love appears among us. As human beings, we know that love is good (behold, it is very good), and deserves a party.

That Jesus should come to the party, says something about the God he follows - how that God delights in love, hallows love, and would have it respected, celebrated. That Jesus, further, when the wine runs out, should provide more, provides something of a sign about his God wanting love to be sustained. God would love for love never to end. Today, at the wedding in Cana, he gives more wine to the celebration as a pledge to the perpetuation of love. He doesn't want love to end. And indeed, later, as he rises from a place of death, he will become another, deeper sign of God's utter commitment to perpetuating love - O would that love never ended!

For messy people, for baggage carried, for love that needs miracle to sustain it, the new wine is given. The God of Jesus believes in love. So, while wine runs out, nevertheless we raise our glasses. Here's to love!





The Knox Church website is at: <http://www.knoxchurch.co.nz.html> . Sermons are to be found under News / Sermons.