

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2026**

**Fourth Sunday of Epiphany**

**Readings:**

**I Corinthians 1: 18-end**

**John 2: 1-11**

I'd like to share a short story with you. It's a story about four people, who I think you will all know.

There was an important job to be done, and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

As I say, four people who we all know well. Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody.

It's a fun story, but there is a much deeper reality behind it, and behind what these four people represent.

Everybody represents an assumption that collective responsibility equals individual action – if it is Everybody's job, then how can it not be done, because the individual who will do it is out there somewhere!!

Somebody represents the hope that someone else will do the job – somebody, but not me!

Anybody represents the capability that exists – we all know that the job can be done.

And nobody, unless something other is true, represents the end result – that the job is not done.

As we read our Gospel reading this morning, the well-known story of Jesus' first miracle, we can see this story in action, but also being challenged.

The setting – a Jewish wedding. An occasion of great joy. Weddings were, in Jesus' day, quite unlike what we are used to today.

The celebrations could go on for a week or more. The rejoicing, the coming and going of friends and families, the ritual, the constant care which needed to be given to all who came.

To run out of wine was quite a problem. Not only a huge social faux pax, this was something which had seen lawsuits taken out against bridegrooms.

It was that serious. It reflected badly on the bridegroom, and on his whole family. The hospitality which was key to the success of the wedding, was in question.

And whose fault was it – well it was the bridegroom's fault.

But, perhaps he could claim that the caterers should have known how much wine was needed. Perhaps he could have claimed that his parents hadn't warned him about the risks. Perhaps he could have claimed that his new wife didn't tell him how much her family could drink.

Perhaps..... or perhaps... or perhaps many other things, passing the blame, excusing the mistake.

By the time Everybody has been blamed, Anybody could have done something about it. But Nobody had spotted, or put right, the mistake.

Until Mary gets involved. And what happens when she does, is what is so well worth hearing this morning.

As a diocese of Bath and Wells, and as a Cathedral, we are beginning a year of prayer. Not to say that we have no prayed before, or that we won't pray after this year, but this year is a year of intentional consideration, focus, and attention to our prayer.

I'll say more about that in a moment, but first, let's have a look at the prayer we hear today, the example given by Mary.

She sounds desperate. Listen to her words, spoken to Jesus. "They have no wine". It isn't a request, in the traditional sense. She isn't asking Jesus to pop down to Waitrose and buy some more. Mary simply lays her problem at Jesus' feet, and leaves the solution up to him.

We can't be sure what Mary does expect from this simple statement. Is she sharing a disaster with her son, somebody to talk to, somebody she is used to having around the house, and sharing moments like this with? Does she expect a response at all, or is this simply a passing comment between mother and son?

But she gets the response from Jesus. The rebuttal. "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come".

Jesus perhaps is aware that he can help, that there is a solution, and the fact that Waitrose won't be founded for another nineteen hundred years won't stop him being able to respond.

But he doesn't. Instead of leaping into action, it sounds as though Jesus simply tells Mary off.

I don't know whether you've ever tried telling your mother off – but in my experience, this doesn't usually end well. And indeed, Mary continues. She tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them to.

We could say that Jesus is now backed into a corner. Everybody is looking to him for direction, for instruction. If he does nothing, whether his time is come or not, he will just look silly.

Or... we could look deeper than this, and think about Mary's words. If indeed she began with a shared statement, a comment made to her son – they have no wine – she is sharing this as a

real problem, a moment of desperation, a friend, wanting to save the reputation of the bridegroom.

As we consider this year of prayer, this is a really good place to start. Mary doesn't tell Jesus what to do. She doesn't think that she knows the solution to the problem. She doesn't give instruction. How often do we all do those things in our prayers?

But Mary, ever the example to us all, simply lays the problem at Jesus' feet, and leaves it with him. And when he refuses, she completes the picture for us.

Laying our problems at God's feet (whether as Father, Son, or Holy Spirit) requires faith. Only when we bring our prayers in the knowledge of God's love, can we expect God to respond.

And so, Mary, once she has laid the problem at Jesus' feet, goes on to instruct the servants. Do whatever he tells you. Absolute confidence. No doubt in Mary's mind, that if Jesus tells them what to do, and they do it, the problem will be solved.

And indeed it was, and for that moment at least, the celebrations could continue. The perfect example of prayer – laying our concerns before God (or in this case, Jesus, as Son of God), with faith in God's response to us.

So, let me for a moment, come back to this year, and the year of prayer. As we learn about the prayer of Mary this morning, what does this mean for our own prayer? How confident are we in

prayer? How genuine are we in prayer? Have we always wanted to explore prayer more?

As the diocese, and the Cathedral, begin this year of prayer, I'd like to encourage us all to think about what this means for us. How might this year change, deepen, strengthen, our prayer life? How might we grow closer to God through our own prayer, and the prayer of the church.

Through the coming year, there will be many opportunities to learn about prayer – in talks, sermons, and events which will be put on and advertised as they come round.

There will be many opportunities to experience prayer, the chalking of homes at Epiphany, labyrinths, pilgrimages, a week in the Summer of guided prayer, the opportunity to spend time together on retreat, an enhanced ministry of prayer on Sunday mornings, opportunities for teenagers to engage with faith and prayer.

This is quite a list, and I don't expect you to remember it all now, but it will all be advertised as it comes round through the year.

But this is also about enabling us, each, and all, not Nobody, and not just Somebody, but Everybody and Anybody, to think about how we pray.

There are things already on offer. Did you know that this Cathedral prays every day, morning and evening. What would it mean for you to begin and end each day in prayer, and if it would

help to know that we do this together, here, then please know that you too are welcome.

The Morning Liturgy, an opportunity to begin the day together and receive communion at 8.00 in the morning. Evensong or Evening Prayer, drawing the day to a close, at 5.15 (or 3.00 on Sundays).

And as we travel this year together, it would be wonderful to hear as well. To hear stories or examples of prayer. To hear what you would like to explore about prayer. To hear how we can grow in community, as well as individually, in our prayer life.

Prayer is at the heart of our relationship with God, is at the heart of the Church, is at the heart of this community. As we hear this morning Mary's powerful example of prayer, how are we, each, and all, individually and as community, ready to respond to the year of prayer, and by doing that, what will we be by the end of it?