Bishop’s letter - Reimaging generosity

In John’s Gospel, the first of the signs that Jesus offers to show who he is happens at a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee (John 2: 1-11). Jesus saves the whole event from being a social disaster. The presenting issue is that the wine runs out. This exposes the families that have organised the event to the possibility of severe embarrassment. Rather than modelling lavish hospitality, they are in danger of showing themselves to be stingy and disorganised. Thankfully Jesus’s mum is alerted to the situation and gets Jesus on the case. He comes up with a solution and all is well.

What gets me every time about this story is the scale and the quality of the solution that Jesus presents. If my calculations are right, Jesus saves the day by creating the equivalent of six wheelie bins full of wine. And not just your supermarket bottom shelf stuff. The wine he provides is of the very best quality – stuff that would delight sommeliers and wine snobs the world over.

In his first action, Jesus could have chosen to show any number of things about himself – his wisdom, his power, his goodness or so on. What’s striking is that he begins by revealing that he is someone of astonishing and abundant generosity. This is at heart who Jesus is.

If this is who Jesus is, then that means that this is who God is too. For ‘in God there is no unChristlikeness’. In his first action, Jesus is showing us that at heart, God is abundantly and astonishingly generous.

If we’re all made in God’s image, might that be at heart who we’re called to be too? Often, the call to be generous can be portrayed as hard and difficult, about self-sacrifice and denial, of the costly call to put others first. But what if we reimagined what being generous means? If we understood being generous as in fact the way to reveal and enjoy our true selves – lavishly, abundantly, joyfully… merrily?

A wheelie bin of wine anyone?

Bishop Michael