The dedication of a new stained glass window at The Church of the Good Shepherd, Kirk Sandall and Edenthorpe – John 2:1-11

During our centenary celebrations last year, Bishop Steven got into the habit of starting his talks with a joke, so I thought I’d do the same today. But, you are mercifully saved, because I’ve failed miserably.

When I googled Jokes about Windows, the only ones it came up with were for the Windows operating system on your computer. It is I’m afraid a sign of the times.

Stained Glass windows have played an important part in my own spiritual journey; they draw you into the meaning and purpose of the images. They’re a thing not just of deep beauty and colour - the work and skill of the artist to be appreciated and admired - but icons that open up the Christian story and the story of the local community, and yours is a wonderful example of that. Stained glass windows can instruct, console, and inspire those who look upon them. For many, the beauty of stained glass windows is calming, and allows them to
feel more prayerful in church. In this respect, the colours can have as much impact on one’s emotions as the picture.

The light coming through stained glass has a dazzling effect. From within the church during the day, light streaming through the windows creates lovely patterns where it falls. This helps create an atmosphere in which it’s easy to meditate. As the light changes throughout the day, the patterns are altered, creating an ever-changing atmosphere in and out of the church. At night, light radiating out from the windows into the community provides an alluring image, welcoming people to come inside.

Stained glass windows are then far more than just ornaments in the church to make it look nice and colourful, they are like the church itself - an opportunity for evangelistic outreach and for drawing people into a deeply personal and spiritual relationship with Christ.

I was really impressed when Eleanor, the designer of your window, said in her final submission “The green represents the new land that
God promises his people and the gold his love”. This is a deeply theological statement which indicates that this window isn’t just a celebration of the past history of this church and its community, but a positive looking forward to the future to a new land and the promise of the new wine of the Kingdom, which is what lies behind this morning’s Gospel reading. This is a window of celebration and hope as in the Gospel story.

The story of Jesus turning water into wine is a very familiar one and if it was taken at face value isn’t that important - running out of wine at a wedding isn’t a big deal - a bit embarrassing maybe, but not the end of the world. But what this story is really about is the direct presence and action of God in the world, about what God in Jesus Christ does for us, about the new wine of the Kingdom ushered in by Jesus.

It’s telling us that it’s only through the risen and glorified Christ that we can find true fulfilment, true nourishment in a spiritual sense of meaning and purpose to life. However the story is, in some ways, as
interesting for what it doesn’t tell us as for what it does. What’s happened in Jesus’ life up to this point that gives his mother the idea that he has the ability to do something about the shortage of wine? Jesus in response, says to his mother when she tells him that they’re running out of wine “Is that any of our business. This isn’t my time. Don’t push me.” She went ahead anyway, telling the servants, “Whatever he tells you do it”. I like the image of Jesus talking to his mother and her ignoring what he’s said – Mothers always knows best. But it makes the point that she expected him to do something. Then we could ask why there’s so much water on hand anyway and what do purification rights have to do with a wedding? Why does Jesus seem to take exception to his mother’s request?

It’s likely that most of the guests hadn’t noticed that the wine had run out and virtually none would have known how the miracle had been done, not even the steward, or the servants who carried the water and wine. So although we’re left with many questions we also have many of the answers.
At one level this is a very human story just as your window portrays a human story depicting as it does, the closure of the coal mines, what was International Harvesters and Pilkington glass, as well as recalling the memory of loved ones through the stars. It looks to the future, the sense of hope that God can birth new things - this story, as its framed, leads us to something much greater. Although it was Jesus’ first miracle the whole thing’s done to reveal his glory, it’s pointing to something eternal. The miracle, like every miracle and sign, gave a glimpse of how things will be in the Kingdom of heaven. When Jesus fed the multitudes, they were hungry again by the next meal time. When Jesus healed the blind, the lame, the sick, there would come a day when they’d die. These things were temporary but in God’s Kingdom they would be everlasting, the blind will receive their sight and the lame will walk and all will be fed.

And when it comes time for Jesus to show such glory on earth he’ll do it in his Father’s time. That’s why he told his pushy mother, when faced with a ticklish social situation, that his hour hadn’t come. It was
too early to show his power, at least to the multitudes. He knows that
when he does a miracle things happen - eternal things, Godly things.
He doesn’t take his power for granted and he doesn’t want his mother
to do so either. He didn’t come to be some sort of magic worker; he
came to reveal the Kingdom.

There’s also something particular about the water – it’s there for the
purification rites. The law required that hands be ceremonially washed
before meals and the vessels to be used cleansed. So there’s
something in this story about worship and ceremonial. Those who
once found access to God by means of ritual purification could now
find their way to God through Jesus. He is the way, the truth and the
life.

The servants’ obedience to Jesus’ command can’t be overlooked either
nor can the master’s surprise at the quality of wine that’s being served
following the miracle. And that takes us to the heart of this story. This
can be interpreted as God saving the best till last. After Abraham and
Moses, after the law and the prophets, God gives us the very best in Jesus Christ. The new wine of the Kingdom brought by Jesus contrasts with the old wine of Judaism. Jesus changes the water of Judaism into the wine of Christianity. The one of whom the prophets wrote has been crowned by the realization that the word became flesh.

And that very best will soon be lifted high on the cross. Jesus through his one sacrifice is able to save completely those who come to God through him. Jesus then, gives us his best but are we willing to receive it.

The meaning and purpose of this well-known story of Jesus turning water into wine is then, I believe, reflected behind the purpose and meaning of your window. It’s an icon on the past but it challenges us to look forward to what Christ is doing in this Church and wider community, it leads us to the new wine which is Jesus and that has the power to draw others to him and transform their lives. If you don’t believe me look at the two upright sections of the window. Right at
the bottom there are angular shapes representing the pipework, the infrastructure, of industry. Further up, these soften and begin to flow like living water, the expression of God doing something new amongst us. The world and the Kingdom blend together, it demonstrates that God isn’t distant from the world he created. We’re the people of the Kingdom called to live and witness in the world.

And I believe he is, he’s calling this church to be a living witness and example to this community as it has been for many years. Let this window be your inspiration to lead you and others to something deeper and every time you look upon it give thanks to God and offer him your life anew. The dove and the olive branch was a sign that after the flood God was making the earth anew again. I believe with a passion that God is calling you to be renewed and refreshed in all that he calls you to do and in your personal relationship with him.

It may feel sometimes that God is asking you too much, that it’s not possible to take on God’s mission but Abraham and Sarah are another
reminder of God birthing new life where it seemed impossible. All we have to do is be open to God and all things will be possible.

This window is a visually powerful reminder and call to you and all of us as Christians, and through his love he will lead you into wonderful and powerful things as this community is renewed and brought before God in the new wine of his Kingdom.