

Isaiah 62:1-5  
John 2:1-11

**Party Time**  
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Jesus has now chosen his disciples—those who will remain closest to him over the next days, months and years—those with him will be the foundation of his Church. They are now about to embark on the journey for which he came: A journey that will change the course of human history (even those who deny his deity acknowledge the impact he made on the world). With such a dramatic agenda what does Jesus do? He takes them to a party, the wedding in Cana.

It's party time! The wedding would be a celebration of life, community and families. Jesus comes as an invited guest to the celebration and community. The whole village would be participating. Mary, his mother is there. We could assume that she is known to the family. This is an occasion for celebration. A celebration that could last for days or maybe even a week. It is here that Jesus begins to build a sense of community with those he has chosen to be his disciples (they are a rather disjointed group, they do need team building).

The wedding is the joining of two families. I recall attending weddings in the Philippines and at each reception there is a moment when each family takes the spotlight and welcomes the other family into theirs (not sure if it is just a Visayan tradition) but it was a part of each wedding we attended. This is a time of joy, celebration and the joining of families. Not have two people become one but two families are now intertwined together. This is an acknowledgement of the binding of two clans.

During the time of celebration they, for whatever reason, run out of wine. Maybe the celebration lasted longer than anticipated. However, this would be a major embarrassment to the host and the steward of the wedding. At the words of Jesus the servants take six (6) ceremonial jars and fill them with water. When the water is dipped from the jars it is wine, a good wine, maybe even a great wine. When it is given to the steward to sample he is amazed. Usually the best wine is served first but this has been saved for last. The celebration continues (each jar holds 20/30 gallons and there are six jars – 120 to 180 gallons of wine).

What do we do with this story? As I reflected on it and talked about it with other clergy I came up several ideas or concepts of how we might apply this story to today.

First, Jesus breaks with tradition. As we have said, usually the best wine is served first but in this instance the best is now served long after the celebration has begun. The Law was the first step in God's dealing with us. It was a big step in building relationships. However with the coming of Jesus a new, better, best has come: grace. Throughout the history of Israel God has been preparing them for this moment. The prophets spoke of his coming. If you thought God was good before, wait till you see what God has prepared for us now. God has saved the best for last. Traditions are falling and a new way, order is beginning.

What traditions might we need to change? Most of what we do is because of tradition, not because of some Biblical imperative. There are times when we need to stop and evaluate what might need to be changed, what new thing God is doing in the world and how we can join in. The way things have always been done might not be the best for today. Is God calling us to new traditions?

Second, God's grace is overflowing. (This was not original with me. It came from table discussion with a group of ABC clergy a few days ago.) For one of the pastors, the wine is a symbol of God's grace. It is given in abundance. It is far greater and better than we could ever imagine. There is no limit to God's grace. This is a reason for a party. God provides for us beyond our wildest imaginations. Our God is a God of grace, love and hope. God's grace is overflowing in abundance!

Third, Jesus is interested not only in the individual but also in the community. Jesus wants to be a part of our whole life. Our individual lives and the life of the community, including our celebrations. It requires that our whole life be lived in relationship to and with him. Faith is not

something we compartmentalize. We should not have a Sunday faith and a Monday faith. A faith for home, a faith for the workplace and a faith for parties. Jesus longs to be a part of our whole life – the life of our community. He is in the process of building community.

I remember a golf outing. There were three of us, pastor and two deacons. At the clubhouse we were asked if another could join us. It was busier than expected and they were discouraging any groups less than a foursome. Why not? So, we met, introduced ourselves and headed out. Somewhere on the course I made a really bad shot (which was and is not unusual). As usual I just shrugged my shoulders, put my club in the bag and walked on—though not that far on. The stranger turned to one of the deacons and said, “I have always wondered what a pastor did when they made a shot like that.” The deacon replied smiling, “The same way he always does.” (Now, I wish I could say that I am that way all the time, I am not. I do falter. But for me to be one with Christ is to be one with Christ in all situations.)

Jesus longs to be a part of all of our life. Which includes our celebrations and parties.

Celebrations are okay. Now some of you know I had more of a celebration planned for our service today but after the events and images from Haiti that we have been viewing all week I just did not feel that balloons, bubbles and party hats should be the norm today. So, I put them away for another time, don't worry I won't forget them! But it is okay to celebrate. It is okay to celebrate life, weddings, birthdays, community events, etc. God goes to parties.

Most villages in the Philippines, again at least in the Visayas, have a village saint and hold a fiesta (party) on the birthday of the saint. Often more is spent on the fiesta than on Christmas. It is a time when homes are open and people go from house to house—eating, drinking and celebrating. However, in many of villages the “Christians” don't participate. I asked why (my favorite question). I was told that the celebrations are celebrating a Catholic saint and... I still wondered, why not take an opportunity such as this and find a way to adapt it to sharing faith. Homes are open; conversation and celebration are part of the community. Does not a closed gate or locked door say that we don't want to be a part of the community? There has to be some way to adapt the fiesta – to celebrate with neighbors, friends and community and still be Christian.

Celebrations are a part of life. Jesus enters the scene with a “grave” agenda before him. And yet, one of the first things he does with his disciples is attend a party. He joins with the community in celebrating and even provides the best wine. I don't see him sitting in the corner shaking his head in disgust at all the celebration. He brought his disciples. He joins in the fun.

I remember a wedding back in the mid 1990's. Now this was back before “Ace of Cakes” and other programs where wedding and party cakes were transformed into celebration pieces. The couple had met at a Disney movie. They wanted a cake that spoke of their relationship and so it was a colorful combination (not the traditional white) with Mickey and Minnie Mouse on the top decked in wedding attire! You will not believe how upset some of the older folk were. There was no celebration with this cake in the room! I just shook my head and walked away – where is our sense of celebration?

There is a long road before them. The coming days will be days like they never imagined. Days of intense joy and intense sorrow. They have been called to be a part of a new community. The road before them will be full of love, life, celebration, sorrow and tears. But right now it is a time of celebration. God has come. God is beginning a new work. God is acting—why not celebrate? God has saved the best till last!

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989  
NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1989