

2 Epiphany Year C January 19 2025

Jesus gives us a reason to celebrate.

John 2:1-11

When my brother got married it was a big event. The entire day had a traditional atmosphere to it. The wedding was hosted in a formal setting. I was in the wedding party and was wearing a tuxedo. As we were waiting to get started one of the members of the wedding party was delayed in arriving. My brother was doing his best not to be upset, and we started to get anxious wondering what was happening. Then the missing groom man arrived at the last moment, and you could tell he was unsettled but relieved. The wedding ceremony went on without any delays or interruptions. It was at the wedding reception that we found out what caused the delay. The groom's man was locked into a bathroom and the door wouldn't open. To get him out of the bathroom he had to crawl out of a second story window onto a ladder to get out.

During the early days of my ministry as a priest I was asked to preside over a wedding. The soon to be husband was married before. In the Episcopal Church, if a person is seeking to get remarried, they need the permission of the bishop and complete pre-marriage counseling. The reason for this requirement is to make sure that the next marriage will be successful and that the issues from the previous marriage have been addressed. Our counseling sessions went well, and he was very confident and excited. He didn't show any hesitancy or doubt about what he was doing. On the day of the wedding, we were waiting together before the ceremony when he became nervous and had to step into the bathroom for a private moment. I smiled to myself I knew that everything was going to be okay.

Weddings are a way to see joy even when perfectly laid out plans go array. I see weddings as a sign about how God overcomes the difficulties of our own making, and we are given a blessing that we didn't earn or could anticipate.

When it comes to weddings it isn't how everything goes well that people remember the most. It is often what has gone wrong that creates the fondest memories and the greatest laughs. It is biblical. Today we hear a familiar story about how Jesus crashed a wedding party and saved the day while he was there.

Weddings are stressful because they carry so many expectations. There is a legitimate need to make sure that the special day goes well. Two families have put in their best efforts to prepare for this one day and as the couple gets close to the date, the more they realize how much control they have, which turns out it isn't much. As a priest I inform the couple that once they get to the wedding day, they cannot mess it up. So, do your best to enjoy the ceremony with each other's company. And yes, there will be something that will go wrong, and you can count on that being the best thing that ever happens on that day.

However, does a celebration of a wedding cross over into our everyday lives?

Recently I have noticed that living today has become a burden. Everything is a struggle and there is an unspoken expectation that being optimistic is not being realistic. For example, I was listening to a teacher, and he is a smart guy. He has a brain that operates at a high level. When he talked to a group of young kids, he prefaced his questions with --- **Here is the problem** It seems like when encountering a new situation, it was a problem and not a place for discovery.

The major subject of today's national news revolves around what is taking place in Washington DC. There will be a new, and yet familiar, president who will be sworn in tomorrow and the opinions about the pending presidency have filled the airways and electronic spaces on our devices. Most of what is being expressed has a negative tone both for and against the inauguration. Personal opinions about the future are bracketed with a guarded emotion.

Has the seriousness of our lives slowly eroded the sense of joy and our ability to celebrate?

I am comforted in knowing that not all is lost. The life and ministry of Jesus is a sign for us to celebrate. Jesus along with his mother gives us a reason to celebrate, even when there is a pending crisis.

I found wisdom in what Rev. Robert Brearley, who is a pastor at St. Simons Presbyterian Church in Georgia had to say about today's Gospel Reading:

(quote) Sometimes the church has forgotten that our Lord once attended a wedding feast and said yes to gladness and joy. Prompted by his earthly mother, Jesus turned water into wine to point us to his heavenly Father, a God who loves to hear the laughter of people **celebrating people**. Sometimes the church has forgotten to live the joy of such revelation.

James McBride Dabbs, an author and Presbyterian elder, remembers religion as the opposite of life in rural South Carolina: "Religion was a day and a place: religion was Sunday and the church: almost everything else was life. Religion was a curious, quiet, and inconsequential moment in the vital existence of a country boy. It came around every week, but it didn't seem to have much to do with the rest of life, that is, **with life**. The sign at Cana tells us that Jesus served a God who puts joy into life, who thinks it is worth a miracle to keep the party going as **we celebrate people**.

God does not want our religion to be too holy to be happy in. Throughout his life and his ministry, Jesus of Nazareth **celebrated people** - people getting married, people being healed of disease and deformity, people enjoying meals together. He carried a spirit of celebration with him wherever he went as he proclaimed a God of mercy and peace and joy. This joyous feast at Cana is still a sign to the church that we rejoice in the people of God and toast the world with the amazing good news of grace.(end of quote)

(Rev. Brearley concludes with this idea and perhaps for us to consider today)

(quote) The church needs to remember how the mother of Jesus swung into action to keep a party going in Cana and how her son determined that it was time after all for the water to be turned into wine, all so a wedding feast could continue. What a way for Jesus to begin his public ministry in John's Gospel! It is called Cana Grace, and it is worth a miracle because it manifests the glory of God - the very God who wants even now for the community of faith to be a **celebration of people**. (end of quote)

When I look at wedding photos I look to see if people are smiling and laughing. When I do, I see that as a sign that God was there. I also find it enjoyable to ask people about their wedding and what were some of the highlights of the event. Without fail there is a story about something going wrong and how people responded to the pending crisis with a sense of relief. Most often the story of relief is surrounded with humor and healthy teasing. There is joy in the story telling.

I look forward to the Sundays at St. Mark's. No matter what has happened during the week, I know that we will have a good experience here. We are surrounded with people and their attitudes of good cheer and honest enthusiasm is infectious. People at St. Mark's are smiling and the conversations that occur are about what is exciting in their lives. I know that what we encounter here is real because people also share their disappointments and personal concerns.

We have a celebration around our table which is open to everyone to come and join with God who we give thanks for the many blessings in our lives, seen and unseen. As the Thanksgiving Prayer is expressed, we all witness how the water and wine get blessed. In that moment that we invite Jesus to come to be present in the bread and wine it is Christ's body who takes the gathered and makes us family. It is the wine that becomes Christ's blood which for us is the lifeline of our faith.

What happens when we either connect or reconnect with our own reasons to celebrate God and people? I believe our spirit of hope is restored and strengthened. We become a people who join with God to celebrate what is worthy and noble. This is also our opportunity to act like Mary. We find the purpose and knowledge that Jesus will make all things work for God's glory and blessing. We can invite Jesus to the party when others are facing their own pending crisis.

Why? Because we know that Jesus loves to celebrate people.

The world is a serious place right now. The prevailing attitude is deadly serious without much play or offering genuine hope. When people do celebrate there seems to be a reservation for people to fully engage in participating in the event. There is an unspoken expectation that something or someone will be a distraction and downplay the festive spirit with a qualifier or reason that the reason to celebrate will not overcome a pending crisis.

However, when Jesus arrives at the party all shall be well. We are given the privilege to commemorate Jesus's resurrection and embrace the mercy that he lived after the cross. God's love overwhelms our disappointments and betrayals and gives us a reason to be excited and hopeful.

During our celebration of prayer, singing, and fellowship it is God's way to take the water of our fears and makes it into wine of His blessing.

People of St. Mark's, welcome to the wedding.