

Celebrations & Interruptions
The Monroe Congregational Church
Rev. Jennifer Gingras
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John 2:1-11

I'm usually invited to go to the reception when I officiate a wedding. Depending on what else is going on that day, whether I know the family really well, or if Clark is able to join me, I might accept. But if I do, I often don't stay around much longer than just after the cake gets cut. I tend to do what my family calls "the Irish goodbye" quietly exiting the back door while everyone else is dancing.

And I know what you think... it's not just because I've got a church service to lead the next morning, or that the older I get the less likely I am to hang around and party all night. I sneak out the back because I'm a pastor, and I know that some folks think pastors and parties don't mix... even if most of you good church people wouldn't say it to me out loud, you know it's true.

A number of years ago I married a couple I barely knew that had been referred to me by a clergy friend. The bride invited me to the reception, and I accepted because I didn't yet know how draining it would be to go by myself to a party where I didn't really know anybody.

So there I was, in line at the door to pick up the little favor that had my table number on it. Each had a guest's name on it, and they were in little groups according to what table you were assigned

In front of me was a bunch of young men from the groom's college fraternity. They got kind of excited when they realized they were all sitting together "Hey, we're at table 10" or whatever.

But there was a noticeable change in tone when one of them saw who else was at table 10. "Guys... we're at that Lady Reverend's table."

Not being able to contain myself (remember I was right behind him) I spoke up and said, "Why, yes you are!"

Now, I didn't take it personally, I knew it wasn't me, it was the role. After all, he didn't know me except from the wedding service where I was sparkling, funny and wise in my clerical robes and sensible shoes!

Seriously, the officiant's table is not where most wedding guests want to sit. Not if they are there to have "a good time."

Maybe that's why everyone always seems a little relieved when I leave early. Again, I know it's not me. I'm a fun gal... right?

Some people just have this expectation about clergy that we're all holy and everything. So you've got to watch your behavior and manners or the pastor will tell God on you! The bottom line, I think, is that people don't want to be judged, especially at a wedding.

I've found it's mainly the people who don't really know much about church who worry about what someone like me might think of them or how The Pastor might not want to have any fun.

And I don't think that stops with just me. Folks who aren't in church that often don't want to be around Christians because they don't want to be judged. They want to be around people who know how to have fun, and somehow that's not us.

Now, I know some of you are thinking, *"But I'm a fun person. That's really not fair for people to think that about me just because I belong to a church."*

And maybe you are the exception! Somehow we've let the world cling to the idea that Christians are a bunch of holier-than-thou sticks in the mud. That we resemble H. L. Mencken's definition of puritanism: *"The haunting fear that someone, somewhere is having a good time."*

It seems that we (not you and me specifically, but Christians in general) have given the world a distorted picture of the church, Jesus, and those who follow him.

And that's why that young man didn't want to sit at my table... he obviously hadn't heard the story of the Wedding at Cana, and how Jesus' ministry was revealed there.

Don't you think it is significant that when John wrote his Gospel he put this story – about Jesus and his disciples at a wedding – at a PARTY – as his very first miracle?

Of all the stuff Jesus said and did in his three years of ministry, this is how it starts: Jesus at a party, turning water into wine... not that sickly sweet Manischewitz communion wine but the good stuff... and lots of it.

Why would Jesus, on his very first journey, take his followers to a party? Didn't they have work to do? Wasn't his time limited? Didn't he have important principles to teach? Why did Jesus go?

Well, he went because he was invited (obviously). But why did they invite him? I suppose they liked him.

Big deal? I think so. I think it's significant that people in a small town enjoyed being with Jesus. I think it's noteworthy that the Son of God didn't act all high and mighty. That the Holy One wasn't holier-than-thou. That his faith made him likable enough that you'd want him at your big event, and not someone to be avoided.

I think Jesus went to the wedding to have fun. Maybe that thought catches you by surprise. We don't tend to think of Jesus as much of a party-lover, but he was. His enemies accused him of eating too much, drinking too much, and hanging out with the wrong people!¹

But honestly, I must confess: It's been a while since I've been accused of having too much fun. How about you?

Jesus took time for a party... shouldn't we? Shouldn't we?

Stuff may not have gone well for us out there since the last time we saw each other. Just this week I've had countless snow-day arguments with my 12-year-old, sat home worried as my son battles COVID alone in his Army barracks, tried to deal with multiple household items still sitting in my garage after my recent move, and the disappointing news that my parents can't travel to see us this weekend for a belated Christmas.

Those problems are real, and sometimes they are enough to make me feel distracted from the goodness of God. But then I encounter you, we share our load, and it's all a little bit easier.

I think that one of the themes of this story about the wedding at Cana is that Jesus gets involved in the little things, like a wedding that has run out of wine.

And Jesus gets involved in a BIG WAY – those six jars of wine would fill 6 HUNDRED to 9 HUNDRED bottles. That's a lot, even for a wedding party that would, in Jesus' time, last a week.

¹ Matthew 11:19

What would have been a tragic interruption becomes, once again, a celebration!

We too can celebrate because we have a teacher and guide who is involved in the real stuff of our lives. As John wrote in the first chapter of his Gospel, we have a Savior who lived among us, who took up residence in the neighborhood.

And every week – in person and online - we celebrate and proclaim that Jesus died and rose again and dwells not just among us but within in through the Holy Spirit.

And every month we celebrate Communion together – the fancy church word for what I do in Communion is CELEBRANT – the leader of the party.

And occasionally, we get to celebrate baptisms together. When we were baptized, we became children of God, temples of the Holy Spirit. We died to sin and rose to new life. And we became brothers and sisters in Christ.

And there is NO REASON that our celebration should end when we walk out the doors of the church, or turn off Facebook or Youtube. We can share the joy of following Jesus – even the FUN of being God’s people – in what we say and what we do and especially with our attitudes towards others.

We can even show people that they don’t have to become super serious all the time -or- (heaven forbid) boring, to follow Jesus.

And maybe, someday, people will even want to sit at the pastor’s table at wedding receptions.

AMEN!