

Sermon on John 2:1-11
Susan Verbrugge
Blacksburg Presbyterian Church
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Have you ever noticed that churches are never, or at least hardly ever, accused of having too much fun? I think I can safely say that not one single Presbyterian church has ever been brought up on charges because they were experiencing too much joy and laughter.

No, instead, we are much more often characterized as John Steinbeck describes one of his characters in *East of Eden*. “[The character] brought with him his tiny Irish wife; a tight, hard, little woman as humorless as a chicken. She had a dour, Presbyterian mind that beat the brains out of anything fun to do.”

Maybe we aren’t quite that bad...at least, I hope not...but haven’t you heard us Presbyterians described as God’s “frozen chosen”? And truly, we know it’s not just Presbyterians that could be accused of that.

And yet, here we are with Jesus, just beginning to know him in the first chapters of John, and where is he? At a party! And this isn’t just some thrown together, last minute party; it’s a wedding party, a joyous celebration, a time where old friends who haven’t seen each other in years get together and have (dare we say it?) fun.

And, not only is he at a party, but he really doesn’t want his mom to bother him with anything he needs to do. “What problem of mine or yours is it that they have run out of wine?” he says. “Don’t bother me, woman. Can’t you see I’m trying to have a good time here? I don’t want to have to work.” If this interchange between mom and son doesn’t make you smile, then you really might be a bit frozen.

But, Jesus, knowing his mom is right, somehow changes the water into wine. His first miracle happens in the midst of a party so that the party doesn’t come to a

screeching, embarrassing halt. And, he doesn't just change the water into that cheap boxed wine stuff. He goes with the good stuff. Typically, folks of his day would serve the good wine first and then get out the inferior fermented grape juice when no one would be able to tell the difference.

But, not Jesus. He saves the best for last. And, he doesn't just fill up a few carafes, he fills six jars that hold 20-30 gallons a piece. That's up to 180 gallons of wine. These folks could have continued to party for many, many days to come!

So, here we are with Jesus in his first miracle. He is not in dour, serious mode. He is filled with joy at a party. And he turns scarcity into abundance, emptiness into excess and least into best.

Many times in the Bible wedding banquets and feasts are used as metaphors for the Kingdom of God. I'm sure you can think of some of them...the bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom outside of the party when their lamps go out, the king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son and then was surprised that no one was coming. And in Isaiah, we are told that as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5).

So, if the kingdom of God is like a wedding party, and if God rejoices over us like a newlywed, and, if the kingdom of God is at hand, what's up with the frozen chosen? Shouldn't incredible joy and God's abundance be pouring forth from us?

Now, I will be the first to admit and lament that there is much pain in this world. There is not a week that goes by that I don't hear personal stories from folks that tear my heart out because of the pain encapsulated there. And, we certainly all know the pain of the world all over the world. It would be easy to become completely cynical, dour, and cold. Some days, it seems that might be easier.

But, this week, I was also reminded of another way to live. It came in the form of a YouTube video. This particular video showed an incredibly talented musician. He is a pianist and a trumpet player who pours forth amazing melodies. He is also a member of the University of Louisville marching band. And, he is blind and confined to a wheelchair. Patrick Hughes was born without eyes and with a disease that will not allow his joints to straighten. At first, his parents were devastated. Why did this happen to us, to our child? What did we do to deserve this?

But then, they experienced his music. By the ripe old age of two, Patrick could sit at the piano after hearing a song played and plunk it out on the keyboard. By three, he was taking requests from his repertoire. His joy in music was contagious, and it infected his dad in a very real way. Now, his dad works the night shift at UPS so he can go to class with Patrick and attend marching band practice and games. His dad pushes Patrick's wheelchair in formation with the rest of the band while Patrick lends his incredible trumpet playing gift. The smiles, laughter, and joy that permeate this family's life are incredible and inspiring to me. Patrick's whole family could have remained in despair. But, they chose joy and found abundant life.

From emptiness to excess. From least to best. That is Jesus' first miracle.

If this is true, how does it speak to us in moments when thousands upon thousands of people are killed in Haiti, one of the poorest countries in our world? It seems to me that this good news speaks powerfully. It sounds to me that instead of wringing our hands in despair and letting our heads hang in defeat, we are called to share the deep joy of the love of Jesus Christ. It sounds to me like we roll up our sleeves and share the abundance, saving the best for last.

In Isaiah today, we hear the words, "I will not keep silent." I will not keep silent about the vindication that you will receive because you are God's people. I will not keep silent that you shall be the crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord.

Can we, with God's deep joy, shout that for the Haitians? Can we shout that from the roof tops, from the city gates, from our very hearts? We will not keep silent. We will not keep the joy to ourselves. We will not continue to hoard what we have while others, in Haiti and all over the world have nothing. We will not keep silent while any of God's people are starving and without shelter and medical assistance. For God's abundance is for all people, poured out for all of us with incredible joy.

Will we stay frozen and silent? Or will we, with Jesus, attend the party and take the abundance of God, the abundance which we have been given, and give the best to the last?

And, when we leave this church, as we lead our lives, will we, as N.T. Wright says, "be mistaken as wedding guests, as party goers?" (*12 Months of Sundays: Reflection on Biblical Readings, Year C*, 21).

May we be so mistaken. Amen!