

**KING & CANA, BLISS & CHANGE: (Are We Having FUN Yet?)**  
A King's Birthday Sermon, Jan. 14, 2007 Dan Stern, Broadview Church  
John 2:1-11 (Wedding at Cana), Psalm 36:8, & 1 Corinthians 12:4-11  
(Once again, with special thanks to my preaching mentor,  
Rev. Grant Gallop; quotations not attributed to others are his.)

Thanks to a hearty Broadview crew who showed up Wednesday during the epicenter of winter's latest attempt to stay cold and snowy, the Christmas tree's down, the ornaments put away. We had to work fast, because according to the church calendar, already the blessed baby Jesus has become a young man out making his way in the world. Jesus has already decided to be baptized, to go out into the wilderness, to resist all competing temptations to get rich and famous quick and dirty, and instead, has appropriately begun to pursue his own God-given calling. Nevertheless, he's still fresh out of the nest enough that his mom, bless her motherly heart, has been missing him a good deal. She's been asking him to at least come home for a visit. So Jesus agrees to accompany her to a party, one taking place just down the road from Nazareth at a neighboring village called Cana. The Cana-nites, no doubt, were the Nazarites' arch-rivals at football. (It's football, by the way, not snow that also explains why some die-hard Seahawks fans aren't here this very morning). Anyway, the party over at neighboring Cana was going to be a fun event. Weddings took months, sometimes years to plan for. And they weren't the prissy, restrictive one man, one woman events the religious right seems nowadays to be pushing. Centered around communal hospitality on a grand scale, a wedding in Jesus' day was a public event accessible to all. It was no "Baptist Sunday School picnic" either. It was the excuse for the biggest party anybody could justify in all of Palestine. Wedding receptions usually took place in Autumn under a full moon, while the wine barrels brimmed with the best of the harvest's bounty, and the full moon signified abundance. Invitations would have gone out far and wide, and it would have been considered a grave insult not to attend. And if you were a hard-working Palestinian peasant, why would you not want to be there? There'd be at least seven days and nights of merriment, of "partying like there was no tomorrow." Of course, in that much time, the moon would have had to wane, as would have the wine.

Indeed, as the story goes, the wine does give out, and Jesus' mother, looking to Jesus, simply states the obvious, "They have no wine." As if her son were the one who was to do something about it. As if Jesus' whole reason for being was to help us have fun, to assist us in furthering joyful, generous, celebrative hospitality. Not to behave appropriately, not to engage in religious niceties. (Gallop:) "The codes of right conduct and all religion of every nation and every land without celebration and sacrament and joy is defined (in that commentary): *they have no wine....* The capacity of a religion based on our human efforts to be good, and to do good, runs out, and the guests need something more. So 'Roll out of barrel,' Jesus' mother says: Let's have a barrel of fun."

*2000-plus years later: Are we Christian people having any fun yet?*

"Some of the old sermons from the ancient church say that the six stone water jars mentioned in the wedding at Cana story represent the six stages of humankind, and that all of them had run out, and were empty. The new dispensation was needed, so Jesus was to refresh the human race with a new vintage....*The wine which will intoxicate the human family with joy, with a festival of*

*abundance, is now on tap.... Come to the cabaret, my friends, come to the cabaret!* Even Mohammed the Prophet would have vintages in abundance on the wine list of Paradise, according to the Qur'an, though along with (Adventists, Baptists, and good folk in addiction recovery), most Muslims disallow it in the present dispensation."

And yet with or without the added alcohol – *are we Christian people having any fun yet?*

Of course, it's about more than just fun alone. Jesus seems to respond to his mother's comment about the wine rather abruptly, rudely even, but what gets missed is the extent to which his mother is provoking him – provoking him to do ministry. She's saying, "Son, you're already 30 year old. Building chairs on a side street in Nazareth is a nice job, but for a boy who has been knelt to by Persian wizards? Sought for by philosophers from afar? Get a life, Jesus! Come on, be a party animal. Get going with your calling, (Jesus), to change the water of the world of want into the wine of the revolution of abundance for all." And Jesus, "the liberator himself is (at first) reluctant, for the change that must come about – (in addition to being fun) is also costly and taxing.

Christian discipleship in its essence, life itself at its best – is always both – it's fun, and...it's costly.

I don't know if Martin Luther King's mother ever urged him on in any similar manner. I do hear it told that M.L.K. was something of a party animal though. I find it telling how hushed and somber and careful and PC some folks tend to get whenever his name is evoked, while at the same time, denying or contradicting the bulk of what he stood for. King's vocal opposition to the War in Vietnam, for instance, and his scathing critique of the economic policies of the U.S. did not win him a lot of popularity contests. His "Beyond Vietnam" speech, delivered at N.Y. City's Riverside Church one year to the day before his assassination, was called by *Time* magazine "demagogic slander that sounded like a script for Radio Hanoi." As he launched his Poor People's Campaign, *Reader's Digest* warned that he was fomenting an "insurrection". Never mind that it was an insurrection ordained of God. Alas, Godly insurrections get resisted – fiercely. Like Jesus before him, it cost him his life. And yet, both, apparently, knew how to enjoy life, to have a good time; and they were both about the business of 'changing the water of the world of want into the wine of the revolution of abundance for all'.

In one way or another, each of us, and all of us together as a church community, are called to be about the same. So for example, we may feel called to spread the word: that it's past time to deploy troops from Iraq, not to send 1,000's more to die. God knows, it's a word that needs to be said and spread. But let us spread the word of that which we oppose based on that which we affirm: our hope and our joy in Christ! Are we progressive Christian peace and social justice activist types having any fun yet? We are called by God, to be a part of the changing the world for the better. But are we not also obliged to savor, to enjoy, all that God has created and called good?

Perhaps the most famous part of the UCC Statement of Faith is the line that invites us to join in on 'the cost and joy of discipleship.' The doing of any good thing has its cost; at the very least, stamina. But a part of a movement our spirits get moving too. And the utilization of our God-

given gifts is far from drudgery for us. Just the opposite! Whatever we're good at, or meant to get good at, can be fun for us. In fact, putting into practice our talents for the greater good is the most rewarding thing we can do in life. Our work won't always be fun, but certainly we will experience celebrative, Cana-like moments. And it becomes almost impossible for us to get bored. I know that there are times when much of what we try to do as a church seems like a struggle. We have to bear our own crosses, and be at cross-purposes with what the larger society values. But joy also comes of it; as we appropriately fulfill our own Godly calling, we find our own bliss.

Martin Luther King was a party man. Thanks be to God. He wasn't into severe austerity. Neither was Jesus. Neither need we be. There is always enough of what is good, and fun in the world to go around. To the extent that we're offering up our own best gifts to God sooner or later a goodly share of pleasures come our way as well.

So think of "The wedding at Cana as a kind of sneak preview of all that will come to pass (in the Commonwealth of God) – (It's) God's plot outline for the smash hit of all time, the story of the rescue of the universe." (Gallop) Have you gotten your invitation to that wedding yet? To "that everlasting all-night rave dance...that unending celebration of life?" The invitation says all are invited to "the universal banquet of wine drinkers and sinners called the Kingdom of Heaven". And "they (shall) feast on the abundance of your house," says the psalmist, "And you (shall) give them drink from the rivers of your delights." Let it be.