

Year C*Epiphany 2*Wedding at Cana*2010*Party-Time!
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There is a choice for joy we must commit to if we are to become Christian.

There is a commitment to joy in becoming Christian. It's a commitment that is sometimes difficult to make. When there is great disaster, as in Haiti now, or the Tsunamis some years ago, or Katrina, or 9-11, or when personal disaster strikes, a part of me wants to curl up in a ball, give up, let the world go into chaos, or hell, or wherever, without me. But the commitment to joy means I cannot do that, at least not for long. I have to not only stay engaged but engaged with hope, faith, and love.

Jesus' presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee captured the imagination of early Christians. They saw in it a parable for all God wants to accomplish in everyone, everywhere, for-ever. A great party. A party that gets better and better. With Jesus as the Messiah this great party became known as the Messianic Feast.

It means we were made for unity, feasting, celebrating, rejoicing, dancing, singing, eating, drinking, marriage. There are limits here, of course. When drinking turns into alcoholism it ceases to be a joy and becomes a curse. When enjoying food turns into gluttony, when dancing turns into carousing, we spoil the party. But spoiling the party does not change God's will to finally, and forever, include us in the party that is never spoiled by excess.

I think of how good you are at partying. I think of our Third Sunday Brunches, Mardi Gras, Halloween. The list goes on.

The really good news is that God is the Great Partier who means to teach us how to really have a good time.

A good time.

A time the satisfies,
a time that fulfills.

A really good time, as someone has said, is one you feel good after.

Jesus, as early Christians imagined him, was calling the world to the Messianic Banquet, the great wedding party of union between God and all humanity. It turns out things like forgiveness, justice, peacemaking, and generosity are much more fun in the long run than having lots of possessions, or taking what doesn't belong to us, or hoarding treasure that is better shared.

This party extends beyond the boundaries of our family, or Church, or country. I read a poem by a Brazilian poet and bishop Helder Camara last week. Here is some of his prose.

All over the world, among all races, languages, religions, ideologies, there are men and women born to serve their neighbor, ready for any sacrifice if it helps to build a more just and humane world.

They belong in their own environment but they feel themselves to be members of the human family. They think of other people everywhere as their brothers and sisters, people from every latitude and longitude, every climate, people of all sizes and colors, rich and poor, whatever their education or their culture.

I beg you, let us try and understand this message with all good will.

Then he goes on. Listen how he affirms his place at the table as a Christian but keeps the party open for others. Padre Camara says,

I am from the west, a Latin American, a Christian. That is the language in which I clothe my thoughts and I shall not change it. If you do not believe in God, do not be irritated when I refer to him, or to Christ, if you are not a Christian. Translate into your own language the truths I speak which are not the creations of personal fantasy but realities experienced by all those who belong to the same spiritual family.

(from The Desert is Fertile by Dom Helder Camara)

This fascinates me. We can be Christian, deeply Christian, yet still open. Father Camara says, "I am a Christian. . . that is the language in which I clothe my thoughts and I shall not change it." The way into the Great Party is not apart from our Christianity but through our Christian beliefs and practices. It turns out that the deeper we go into our tradition the closer we are to people of good will everywhere.

I imagine the Messianic Banquet as a great and beautiful Cathedral (thanks Bill) with great arches disappearing into time and space. Through one arch enters a Christian of some stripe, say a Pentecostal from the Holiness tradition. Through another arch comes a Southern Baptist. An Episcopalian through another. Surprised to see each other we say "How did you get here?" But then the surprise continues as a devout Muslim enters through a great high dark arch. And a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Secular Humanist, a whatever.

Christ at the center, at his great altar, now turned table, invites them, invites us all, to His Great Feast.

If the Great Feast reaches everyone it also reaches into every part of everyone. Nothing is left uninvited and unredeemed at the Messianic Banquet.

This can be hard for us.

We may want to seal something up in a secret room, locked away forever. But the joy of the Messianic Feast demands a great deal from us. It insists that every sorrow be comforted,
every sin forgiven,
every loss restored,
every wound healed.
every tragedy redeemed.
Eventually every locked room must be opened and

be exposed to the light and healed.

We commit to joy.

I can no longer nurse resentment,
discontent,
rage,
or sadness.

Someday I must let them go into the fires of God's happiness.

Isaiah foretold the Great Messianic Banquet when he said,
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land Married;
for the LORD delights in you,
and your land shall be married.
For as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.¹

We will be rejoiced over.
We must choose that joy over sorrow.
Joy has already chosen us.

¹*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Is 62:3-5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.