

Reimagining the Church – As a Party

Intro: John 2:1-11. The first sermon I preached after moving here in November of 2001. [set the stage and the story]

I. It Began At A Party

- A. We might be surprised that Jesus would start his ministry at a party. But that's only if you don't know God very well.
 - 1. He is the God of rainbows, bees that dance when they find a rich source of pollen, raucous parrots, baboons. Etc.
 - 2. And what a party this is going to be! Jesus exchanges gallons of washing water for wine.
- B. This is exactly what Jesus intended to do with religion: exchange the weight of rituals for the joy of a relationship with God.
- C. By "party" we aren't talking politics! We are talking about the celebration of love, fellowship, and relationship. We're talking about celebrating the ending of the Old Covenant, its laws, rituals, boundaries, and tribal nature. We're talking about the day the chains come off, the laws are repealed, and the long, long distance between us and God is closed like THAT!
- D. Of course, it was more than a clap. It was the sound of a hammer on a nail, the sound of a stone being rolled away, the sound of a voice calling us inside, welcoming us home.
- E. Of course, it's a party!

II. Scandalous?

- A. Is this whole subject irreverent? No, but you can be excused for thinking so. Most of the religious establishment of the day thought Jesus didn't behave like a real minister (rabbi, priest, yada yada) should. Luke 7:30ff.
- B. Jesus didn't dance to their tune. They couldn't control this Messiah. He was who He was (sound familiar?).
- C. And to prove it, when the Pharisees asked him to dinner, he went and enjoyed himself... and that was before the woman came forward and did something scandalous... and Jesus offered her grace.

- D. He didn't hang around the temple or the synagogue and act all holy. He didn't try to get more Jews into the temple or launch an inward looking restoration (like the Pharisees).
- E. He walked out of the temple grounds, found the publicans, sinners, drunkards, prostitutes, etc. and told them that they were now officially invited to a wonderful party.
- F. No wonder it all began at a wedding feast! And no wonder that it began with an exchange: the throwing out of bathwater used for rituals and the bringing in of lots of wine!

SECOND SECTION:

I. **Where are the people?**

- A. [this is the church, this is the steeple.... Rather small congregation, isn't it?] Where are the rest of the people God has invited to the party?
- B. Maybe they didn't get the invitation. Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever heard about a party you wish you'd been invited to? Maybe you thought you SHOULD have been invited to it?
- C. Or... have you ever been invited to a party but were too intimidated to go? Maybe it required clothes you didn't own [white tie and tails, please...]. Maybe it was in a neighborhood where your car wouldn't fit in. Maybe you were afraid you wouldn't know how to behave at the party; that you'd make a fool of yourself.

II. **What Would Jesus Do?**

- A. Jesus has already shown us how to handle this. There are people all around us who just aren't on the religious party invitation mail route.
- B. Some of them aren't aware there's even a party going on! They are too used to church buildings being full of bathwater and rituals to ever imagine them full of joy and acceptance – a place where a broken woman can come up and join in the party even if it is in a Pharisee's house.
- C. Some of them are afraid they won't fit in. [“what kind of clothes should I wear?”] They don't know how to behave.

- D. They aren't coming to the party, so we have to do what Jesus did – take the party to them.
- E. This church is going to follow the example of Jesus. We are going to find the people he would look for. We are not going to remain in the temple grounds.
- F. Our calling, our mission, and our passion is to reach those not on our usual route.
- G. [insert agreed wording here. Offer invitation to afternoon meeting]

Invitation – you're invited to the party?

Admonition – a prayer of rededication to following Jesus wherever He goes.