

“Celebrate”

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**First Presbyterian Church
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John 2:1-11**

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I wanted a good Scottish wedding joke to begin with this morning, but I couldn't find one that I could tell.

As most of you know Shawn and I just traveled to Scotland to celebrate our daughter Heather's wedding to a Scotsman – Jamie Boyd – a wonderful kind, and loving young man. They are living in Glasgow, a beautiful city!

We met and visited with Jamie's parents – Allan and Liz, as well as getting together with old friends from 18 years ago when we lived in Alva and I preached in their church. I gave your greetings last Sunday in church. They were as friendly as always. Great hospitality!

Alright, how about this one? After 30 years of dating, at last, one beautiful evening on the Isle of Skye, Scotland, Jean thought it was time to ask the question. “Sandy”, she breathed, “is it not time we were getting married?” After a long silence he sighed, “Yes, Jean it is” A hopeful gleam spread over Jean. “Yes, Jean it is. But who would have us?”

At least it was in Scotland, and it wasn't 30 years for Jamie and Heather – but close – 16 years. Jamie never lost hope and Heather's best friend, turned out to be the love of her life.

They look so good together!

The wedding was a week ago Saturday. At the dinner reception, we had a delightful array of delicious Scottish entrées. I enjoyed the salmon. The whole meal and atmosphere were totally refreshing. Now Shawn – well she thought she would go native, all the way. She ordered Haggis and Black Pudding; which includes sheep stomach, sheep tongue, and other sundry delights. The Black Pudding usually includes pork fat and pig blood. Shawn enjoyed the wedding and the reception – minus certain foods. She was refreshed by the company and energy of the bride and groom and wedding party.

I love weddings! Of course this one was very special being my daughter's nuptials.

Weddings – a man and a woman pledging themselves to each other, and if so blessed to care for, and raise their children – in love. Of course it is appropriate to Celebrate such an occasion! For the wedding is not only personal (between two children of God), but it is communal – integral to the continuation of community and society – as we know it, and believe it to be healthy and most fulfilling.

I have had the honor and joy of officiating over many weddings in my 30 years of ministry. I have been blessed being a part of some of your weddings. I've arrived at that age where I am marrying a child of God whom I baptized as an infant, and carried through the sanctuary – in joy and expectation for their future!

Celebrations – from birth, baptism to marriage, and more!

We need to take time to celebrate!! Perhaps even more so – when challenges grip us. But, celebrate we must!!

Did you know that the early Christians believed that every Sunday morning was a time to celebrate? Easter morning became the template for all other Sundays. And keep in mind these Christians often had to secretly meet to celebrate. Times were rough for them. And over the centuries celebration often changed to:

“You must go to church or God will get you.”

“You must be religious, or you will go to hell!”

“If you are a true Christian, you won’t do that, or that or that!” “You dare not have fun!”

Too often Christianity, following Christ; has been turned into a “Don’t do that!” “Fear filled.” Sad faith!

I once asked a friend, who is also a religious leader, about a particular Christian symbol, as to what it represents. Without a pause he answered, “That life is suffering.”

Now, friends, I know that much of life involves, invokes suffering – but – I’m not comfortable to define my faith, my view of the world with the mantra – “life is suffering.”

I know about suffering!

What we humans need, is to estrange ourselves from as much suffering as possible! Negativity encourages more negativity!

And faith must be a triumphant call to life – to the good and positive of life! And celebrations are in order! Really! In fact prescribed!

My friends, among many other attributes – Christianity, religion – must believe in celebrating, in embracing joy, happiness and fun!!

And I share this, to the surprise of many millions of Christians.

It sounds foreign.

Fun?

Celebration?

Yes!!

Perhaps even Jesus’ disciples had a difficult time with this idea. In John’s gospel, disciples are being chosen and called. They are just getting started with this whole mission of the gospel thing.

There they are, up in Galilee, a beautiful green mountainous Eden. And their new Rabbi, Jesus, is taking them somewhere. I imagine some were thinking, “Oh, this spiritual Jesus – he is taking us up to the top of one of these hills – for us to seek God. Surely he will gather us in a circle and we will spend hours in meditation.” And Nathaniel (a new comer) may have thought, “Jesus will turn south toward the desert where we can fast for several days, and heighten our spiritual awareness. We will see visions, and be thirsty.”

And Philip was musing, “I’ll bet he’s going to turn right and take us down south to the sacred Temple in Jerusalem. There we can offer sacrifices, and pray. He can also teach us, as we sit in the sacred outer court of the Temple. I can’t wait!!” “Oh, the heat and humidity will be high! We will sacrifice in our discomfort!”

But, no mountaintop,

No desert,

No Temple – not this time!

So where is the spiritual leader taking us?

As Jesus enters the property he turns to his followers and says, "Let's party." "Let's celebrate!" "A wedding is taking place – and we were invited!" "Get rid of those hangdog expressions! Loosen up!" (a Zanicky Greek translation.)

Certainly there are times for the other parts of our faith, but never neglect to celebrate! (I just may be preaching to the choir!)

Apparently, the celebration had been going on for some time, and the wine runs out! Can you imagine? No more wine? No more Glenfiddich? Graygoose? at a wedding reception? How embarrassing to the family! A great way to ruin a party. (Keep in mind, I'm not encouraging over drinking, by no means! I'm just exegeting the Bible! Keep that in mind!)

For some, they would love the story to read that Jesus dumped the wine out: "There, no more celebrating!" Or he would change the wine into water! "There settle down, you dour Presbyterians, calm down. Have a nice cool cup of water."

His mother goes up to him, in the midst of the turmoil and fear. "The party's over" She says to her son, "they are out of wine."

Mom, give me a break! I'm not ready yet." But mom knows her son. She probably smiles at him, that understanding expecting smile and says to the waiters, "Do what he tells you. He will fix things."

We then read of the six stone jars for purification, for washing hands and feet. This was a dusty world. They fill the stone jars with water and, viola they have wine! Not just any wine, but the best wine! One hundred twenty, to one hundred fifty gallons of Rothchild, not Boonsfarm. The guests are overjoyed. How wonderful, "saving the best for last!" Normally you put out the best first, then after some time, palates and equilibrium are not so discerning and balanced, you bring out the Boonsfarm. Who will know? The celebration continues and is increased!

For Christians, the way of Jesus is a way of involvement in our world, which includes celebrations.

There are times to celebrate!

A question I have asked before, one that needs to be brought to mind; has the wine, in your life run out? (You know what I mean) Whatever it is – has it run out? In the midst of your life, somewhere in the past, has the last drop of joy, hope, celebration, been drained out of your soul? Perhaps you haven't even realized that it's gone. You've become so accustomed to empty pitchers, empty jars. No expectations! No sense of elation. **The wine is gone!**

Many just get used to living, (if you can call it living) without this wine, this joy, and celebration. No doubt, there are many causes for the wine drying up in our lives.

Betrayed!

- That one who pledged himself, herself to love you forever – did not.
- That son or daughter who has sapped your strength and continues to selfishly draw your life from you
- That job you've committed to all those years, has drained your emotions and intellect and thrown you away.

Disappointments

- Life just hasn't gone according to plans. Relationships, profession, friends, community have drained you dry.

Have you gone from – HIGH expectations to LOW expectations to NO expectations?

My friends – I am here to remind you... You've been created for more, so much more!

And then, the plain ordinary water is changed into wine! And it's even better than when you first tasted the wine of celebration! Saving the best for last! Don't give up! Be open and willing to taste the newness of life!

Consider:

Do I celebrate life?

When did I give up celebrating?

Am I willing to taste the newness of life?

Will I risk partaking, imbibing life's possibilities once again?

Life is filled with Celebrations! Be a celebrant!

Taste the new wine of joy and hope! Celebrate!

Amen.