

Jesus and the Party Poopers, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 21051009  
Philippians 4:1-9 and Matthew 22:1-14  
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 9 October, 2005

Few things are more detrimental to the Gospel of Jesus Christ than a sourpuss Christian! You know the kind; they rarely smile at anything. It's bad enough they don't like fun themselves—you feel guilty having fun in their presence.

A while back, I stopped behind a car with a bumper sticker that said, "Honk if you love Jesus." I honked, and the driver jumped out of his car shaking his fist and yelling, "What's the matter? Can't you see the light's still red?"

If Christians go around acting like that, why would anyone want to join in their faith? Jesus was not a sourpuss. The church tends to dwell too much on the dusty sandals, the wounded side, the lonely figure in garden, and the hanging body. There were other aspects of Jesus too. He is the best example of a balanced life. It was said that he came eating and drinking as well as praying and healing.<sup>1</sup>

The evangelist John described Jesus's first act of ministry as going to the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. There, he changed water into wine.<sup>2</sup> This surely caused some raised eyebrows among the pharisees and elders in the synagogue. The church's tendency has been to change wine into water ever since.

Jesus told a parable about a wedding feast thrown for invited guests. There is a feast, a wild party, thrown for us, but we are reluctant to go. We come up with excuses. It is difficult to feel the banquet spirit. Some are overwhelmed by depressed feelings. If it isn't trouble in the family or in the marriage, then it's trouble at work. If there is no trouble there, we get depressed by the daily headlines. Jesus faced the same kinds of things. He was not a naive optimist. He was realistic, but he could take time out to go to wedding banquets.

Charles Dickens opens his book, *A Tale Of Two Cities*<sup>3</sup> with the words, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." It is always that way. Our times are depressing, but no more than at other times. It is still the best of times and the worst of times. Are we going to the banquet that God invites us attend? The problem is not that there isn't a party, the problem is that we are party poopers.

Let us look at Jesus's parable little deeper. A wedding feast in Jesus's day was not a simple affair like we have where we rent a party hall, hire a band, and pay for a catered meal with dancing and fountains of flowing champagne. In Jesus's day feasts lasted a whole week. Wine and food flowed freely. People dressed in their best. The party would not end until all the relatives, friends, and neighbors had attended and eaten.

The king sent servants out to call all the guests who had been invited to his son's marriage feast. Those who were invited made fun of the feast. In fact, they were downright rude. One went to see his farm. Another went to check his business. The rest seized the servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.

The parable is an allegory to describe how the Jews had been invited to the kingdom of heaven by Christ, but would not accept the invitation. They had other things to do. Finally, they beat and killed the one who invited them, Jesus. Then the king, God, went out and invited other people from streets--rabble-- new people. Remember? The disciples went out and invited the Gentiles. They came to the feast and had a ball. They accepted the invitation to the kingdom of heaven.

In a strange twist of fate, we are the invited. You and I are the ones the messengers call to. How do we respond? There are those who go back to the farm saying, "I have work to do at home." "I have a

---

<sup>1</sup>Matthew 11:19

<sup>2</sup>John 2:1-11

<sup>3</sup>*A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens, 1859

social obligation to go to.” So, we pass up opportunities given at church. We pass up daily devotions and prayer. We pass up small group experiences– the things that would really expose us to the depth of joy in the kingdom.

There are those who have too much work to do at their business or job. They are the workaholics. One job does not provide enough income, so they have to get a second job moonlighting somewhere. Then the spouse has to go out and get a job. Pretty soon, no one is home to take care of the kids. Does all the work bring about the desired happiness? Home is not a place of joy, because there is no one to talk with. Striving for money is usually hollow and joyless.

There are those who treat the servants shamefully. It is interesting the way people who are angry at God take their anger out on the church, its members, and its ministers. Perhaps you have been laughed at when you talked of your church or your faith to someone else. Martin Luther King Jr. was certainly one of the servants proclaiming kingdom God. He called to people to come to the banquet love, equality, and fellowship. Look at what happened to him. None of the invited guests in the parable were found worthy–not because something was inherently wrong with them, but because they didn't want to come. They were Party Poopers!

Are we worthy? I know many people who don't feel worthy. Guilt, sinfulness, and evil weigh down many who are invited to the feast. We work harder and harder to prove ourselves worthy. We work ourselves to the bone in service projects– giving gifts to others so we can arrive at worthiness. No matter how much we work, we never feel worthy. In the course of working, we miss the feast. We *are* worthy. We are God's children!

Compare the marriage feast to your concept of the Christian faith. The kingdom of God is like a wedding feast. It is a place where we can let loose, sing, dance, eat, and enjoy fellowship with each other.

How many of us can't stay for the meet and greet time following worship because you have work to do or some other excuse? How many won't come to other programs because you can not spare the time? It may not look like a wedding feast here. The church is not perfect. It has factions and disagreements. Something may have been done differently than you wanted, but I know that here people tend to be more open, honest, and warm than in most groups.

What conversations do you have with people at work, or at other parties? Are they about the weather and sports? These are meaningless things! Here at church we can talk about deeper subjects–subjects, believe it or not, that bring more happiness than sports or the weather. It is amazing to me how deeply joyous we feel when we have conversations about life and death issues– when we are open and honest. Church leaders, boards, and church school classes discuss problems of life and church with give and take. Opinions are shared and accepted. That is when I know something meaningful has happened. Oneness has occurred. It is good practice for being with a person who is sick or in trouble. Talk about the weather and sports won't do any good there. That is when you can really get down and share guilts, sorrows, and happy times. That is a wedding feast.

I would like to see this church become one big wedding banquet. That is how God would like to see us– where we come willingly, take our part and accept the message of God's love. There is fun, vibrancy, dancing, and aliveness. Others outside can see it and ask what it is that we have that makes us enjoy life so much. The people in the streets will be clamoring at the door to come in. God wants us to be that kind of people.

Let's make this place a banquet. Get into a group in the church: a board; a fellowship group; or the choir. Let there be no sourpusses! Let this be a piece of kingdom of heaven: part of the joyous banquet.

The banquet feast here is the acceptance of the invitation given by Christ to come to a place where you are accepted as you are–where you know you're loved by God.

What will you do with the invitation to the banquet? Will you come up with an excuse or accept the call of Jesus and come and enjoy it? Remember, people from the streets, both good and bad were the ones who came. You can come too!