

Jesus is the Life of the Party¹ John 2:1-11, Isaiah 25:6-9

Reflect on your own, or share with another friendly person:

What's the best party you've ever been to – and why? What made it so memorable?

It's time to party!

Most of us enjoy a party. Whether it's a birthday party, New Year's Eve party, 50th wedding anniversary, or housewarming party, they are all occasions where loved ones come together to eat and drink, sing and dance, catch up with relatives and friends, share stories and celebrate.

Today's story tells how Jesus and his disciples were invited to a party: a wedding feast. The people of ancient Israel sure knew how to celebrate. In those days, wedding feasts could last upto a week! It's hard for us to imagine – but imagine the conversations and stories that could be shared. For guests attending the banquet, it was certainly worthwhile once they got there!

God made life to be a party

When God creates, he says his creation is very good! (Gen 1:31) He has given us many good things to enjoy. God is not a wowser. He wants us to have fun. He made us to sing and dance and laugh. His plan for us is that everyone should get along with him; and with one another. In God's plan, life is meant to be one long celebration of his goodness - one great party.

The death of a party

But things don't always go according to plan, do they? At the wedding feast Jesus attended, they ran out of wine. In Aussie culture, what happens when the grog runs out? It usually spells the death of the party as people go home.

But in Middle Eastern culture it's much worse! In a culture where hospitality was of utmost importance, it was an insult to your guests to run out of food and wine *before the guests were ready to leave!*

This wedding feast was about to end in failure and shame for the groom and his family. The guests would have to leave early, and the reputation of the family would be shot to pieces as people talked about the incident for years to come. Talk about embarrassing!

Life is not always the party God planned

Life is hard. It's filled with pain, hurt and tears. We don't always get along. We don't always have fun:

Arguments and bullying start at a young age among siblings. From primary school to university, pecking orders and peer group pressure can bring despair into young people's lives. Later in the work force, our young people have to navigate their way through petty power struggles in a dog eat dog world.

Marriages which began with celebration sometimes end up in a tired and hollow drudgery - filled with arguments and strife. Marriage can be a party that lasts a lifetime; yet we know that for some it isn't. Some end up in embarrassment as the seeds of neglect, insecurity, lust and control end up in the pain of divorce and family breakdown.

Nearly every day, we run into circumstances and events we cannot control. How many of us have sighed at the end of day, feeling totally exhausted, yet peeved that we didn't get as much done as we wanted? The resulting frustration when trying to resolve issues or meet deadlines can suck the joy out of life.

The health and vitality of our youth gives way to physical decline. When injury or illness strikes, we are reminded of our human frailty. Funerals remind us that in time, death will come to us all. We human beings are not masters of our own destiny, but are vulnerable to accidents, sickness, disease and death. Most funerals are anything but a party!

¹ For a great portrayal of this story in Jewish culture, check out on YouTube: *The Chosen*, series 1, episode 5.

We need help in life. We need help in our relationships. We need help in our marriages. We need help to turn funerals into festivals. In Jesus, God's help is at hand.

Jesus is the Life of the party

In our story, the wedding party was dying. Jesus brought it back to life again. How? By turning 6 jars of water into lots of wine!² The volume is staggering: between 600 and 900 bottles of the best red wine they'd ever tasted! Jesus transforms this party from death to life. The celebration could go on because of Jesus. He proves to be "the Life of the party".

Jesus transforms the ordinary into the extra ordinary

He did it with wine. He does it with people. Just as he transformed that wedding feast, **Jesus can transform the human heart**: from hardness to softness; from meanness to kindness; from harshness to tenderness; from bitterness to forgiveness. By reconnecting us with God, Jesus frees us to love – so marriages, friendships, and families can again become celebrations.

We need God's life in Jesus to deal with the past. Friends, there've been times when others have let you down and hurt you. AND there've been times when you've let others down and hurt them. You know, there will be many more to come... because none of us are perfect!

We ALL need God's forgiveness. We also need God's help to apologise for our wrongs; and to forgive one another. When you need God's help in either of these, stand at the foot of the cross of Christ and ask yourself the question: "Why is he there?" Jesus took our very worst and wrapped grace around it. From the cross he prayed, "Father, forgive them!" (Lk 23:34)

Secure in God's unfailing love, Jesus gives us the humility to take responsibility for our actions and confess to those we've hurt: "I was wrong, I'm sorry." And the Jesus gives us the grace to grant mercy to those who've hurt us: "I forgive you!"

In the Lord's Prayer, we say: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." It's how God gives us a fresh start each day. It's how we give one another a fresh start each day. Forgiveness and reconciliation is how God breathes new life into relationships.

We need God's life in Jesus to fill our hearts with love that builds up others. Paul describes it 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. Rather than being self-centred, the love of Jesus empowers us to take an interest in other people and look for ways to bless and encourage them.

We need God's life in Jesus to put the zip and sparkle into marriage. Doing life together, working as a team, and sharing the joys and sorrows of life – you can do that for decades and be all the better for it! When the compassion and kindness of Jesus is present in sharing hearts, minds, and bodies, he transforms the ordinary into the extra-ordinary.

We need God's life in Jesus to transform the ordinary stuff of life. Putting out the garbage, repairing broken toys, cooking meals, doing dishes, cleaning the house, mowing the lawn, paying bills, fixing the car... these are all avenues for expressing love in service to one another. As Jesus gives you satisfaction and joy in these hum-drum jobs, the ordinary is transformed into the extraordinary.

We need God's life in Jesus to prepare us for the heavenly banquet. Jesus is the bridegroom who will come to claim his bride: the Church (Rev 21:1-6). Isaiah had a vision of it: the best of meats and the finest of wines. God's people will be rejoicing in how the Lord has conquered death forever – and enjoying their salvation! (Isaiah 25:6-9) It will be the party to end all parties.

Friends, God invites you to his heavenly banquet. You RSVP by receiving Jesus' forgiveness and leadership over your life. You practice for the big event by joining other believers in sharing the love and good news of Jesus with others.

² 6 jars, each holding 75-113 litres = 450-678 litres.

Just as wine is God's blessing to enjoy, Jesus is God's BEST blessing to enjoy.

If we want to taste the good things God has in store for us, if we want our relationships to be all they can be, if we want to participate in God's good news story for his world, then Jesus is the key.

We will do well to invite Jesus into our celebrations and commiserations; into all our relationships and endeavours; and into our work, rest and play. Then we will experience something awesome, as he again turns the ordinary into the extra-ordinary.

Friends, Jesus is still the Life of the party. Let Jesus be the Life of your party...and you'll be able to celebrate the good things of God forever!! Amen. (c.1400)