

The House in Cana  
Psalm 107  
John 2:1-10

About a month ago, the Monday Bible study group at our Church discussed the story of Jesus' changing water to wine at the house in Cana, today's scripture reading. We read the story of "Rafca the Bride of Can" in a book, "Jesus the Son of Man" written by Khalil Gibran. After reading those books I came to envision a theme for the ministry and life of our church for 2009, "The House of the Wedding Feast in Cana."

The Gospel of John has a wonderful format. If you look closely, there is a simple story that is told, and then behind that story, if you choose to look, there is a deeper meaning that is full of wisdom and provides gems of truth. Here, in this story, found a theology for our ministry together.

"The House of Cana" is an image of ministry and my theology of ministry for 2009. The theology of "The House of the Wedding Feast" is to celebrate, to feast, to rejoice together, and to invite guest among us. The message of the Gospel is the Good News of the Wedding feast, the Feast of Kingdom of God. That is the message for the church to embrace.

Recently I also read an article titled "Rethink Church" in the Interpreter magazine, a United Methodist Communication. It challenges United Methodists to rethink what it means to be church and to do church. The rethinking of church is not only my concern or issue but also the concern and issue of the United Methodist Church in general. The general agencies of the United Methodist Church will also need to rethink what it means to advertise and market our general church, which is the third-largest denomination in the United States.

"Rethink Church" will be an opportunity for people within the church to go deep into considering again the meaning and purpose of church. Rethinking church and its ministry myself, I would like to share my theology of church through the icon of the House of Cana in the Gospel of John.

"What does it mean to be church?" Of course, church doesn't mean the building itself. Rather it means the gathering of people who are called to be people of God by the Lord, and by their profession of faith. The gathering is like the gathering at a wedding ceremony taking place. At such a gathering there is celebration, feasting, dancing, rejoicing and blessing.

The core message of Jesus is the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is frequently metaphorically explained as a wedding ceremony in Jesus' own teaching. The nature of the coming Kingdom is like a wedding process. The Kingdom is compared to a royal marriage. (Matthew 22:2) In the Gospel Jesus himself is portrayed as a Bridegroom and His disciples as guests. (Mark 2:19-20) In other passages in the New Testament, the Church is figured as the bride and Christ as the Bridegroom. (2 Cor. 11:2) Therefore,

the wedding celebration is the best metaphor of the gathering of the people of God. Importantly, in our gathering there must be something as exciting and wonderful as in a wedding ceremony.

The purpose of gathering is exactly the same as the wedding ceremony. Especially in worship, the purpose of the gathering is to celebrate and bless the main figure in the wedding, the Bride and Groom, the Lord God who is the One we celebrate and bless in the worship service. There must be a spirit of joy and blessing in the gathering of a wedding as well as in worship. And feasting and fellowship follow the ceremony.

When Christ is present in the life of the church, we experience the miracle of worship, celebration, and the joy of life shared among the gathered people. Without the spirit of joy and blessing which Christ brings, worship becomes not a celebration of life, but a mournful ritual.

Like a wedding ceremony there is privilege among the participants in worship. Prior to a wedding ceremony, there is a process of sending out invitations to the anticipated wedding. Similarly, we are cordially invited by the host, our God, to participate in a Royal wedding ceremony between God and God's people. The Call to Worship, which begins our worship services is a way of responding to the invitation of God. The invitation to the wedding, the invitation to worship, is a privilege and honor.

Next Tuesday is inauguration day for the new President of United States, Mr. Barak Obama. Is there anyone here who has received an invitation to the inauguration ceremony from the White House in Washington D.C.? I personally have not. If someone were to get such an invitation, I imagine that he or she would be honored and feel privileged. And, I imagine that such a person would be busy preparing to attend such a gathering, anxious to choose what to wear to the special party.

In my previous Korean Church, most of the congregation dressed up quite well for worship on Sundays. There are some reasons. When Korean immigrants came to the United States, many packed nice clothes, dresses and newly purchased custom-made formal attire, and brought them in their luggage to United States. But, after they arrived in the United State and began their life as immigrants living in the Korean American society, they have never had any chance to wear these fancy clothes. Unexpectedly, they found that blue jeans are the most favorable type of clothing for every day wear in daily life.

One Sunday I told them, "I know you that you have fashionable nice clothes, which you brought from Korea, which you don't have a chance to wear. I would let you know that you are cordially invited to a Royal ceremony next Sunday, to which God has invited you, so don't forget to wear those fancy clothes you have tucked away, and remember as VIP's in the pew on Sunday morning. If you won't wear those clothes you brought for worship next Sunday, you will lose the chance ever to wear them!"

The next Sunday, everybody wore the fancy clothes they had never had a chance to put on, except those who missed my announcement the previous Sunday. As they sat in worship, wearing their best attire, they talked like VIPs, they acted like VIPs, and offered their gifts like VIPs. What to wear to an important party is one of the important matters at a wedding.

Secondly, fellowship is as important as worship at a church gathering. Where there is celebration, there is always excitement. Gathering for a wedding is exciting in part because of the anticipated feast after the wedding ceremony. We are looking for excitement at any gathering. Unfortunately, exciting gatherings cost a lot. Exciting gathering like musicals, operas, super bowls, and prestigious banquets are expensive. For many of us, the chance of going to such an exciting gathering is limited.

However, human beings are social beings who are always looking for a place to belong. A wedding is a special occasion, a special gathering full of excitement and expectation. There are music, dance and food. Especially, wine is a favorite item on the banquet table.

Today's scripture reading paints a picture of a problem that arose during the time of fellowship following a wedding ceremony. At the wedding at Cana, the wedding planner hadn't planned too well. The interesting thing about this wedding is that many think the planner was Mary, the mother of Jesus. Because of the way the story is laid out, it is very possible that Mary was in charge of this wedding (she orders the servants around, indicating her responsible position).

It is recorded in the Coptic Gospels that Mary was the sister of the groom's mother, or in other words, she was the groom's aunt. Some non-biblical writings about this event say that the groom was John himself, the writer of this Gospel and one of the disciples. We don't know this for sure, but we can make a good guess.

Back in the day, these weddings were the happening events of the village. Typically, ceremonies would take place in the evening, after which the bride and groom were paraded through the town with a canopy over their heads and flaming torches to light the way. There was no escaping the family and friends for a honeymoon. Instead, the couple remained at their home for a full week, holding an "open-door policy" for any and all visitors. They were treated like the king and queen, complete with a total makeover and people who met their every need for pampering. It was a week of village participation in full-out care for the wedded couple.

A Korean Methodist Church in Los Angeles shared its facility with an Anglo congregation. The two congregations within one church had had a good relationship. They had joint worship services occasionally and pot lucks. When the two congregations got together for their pot lucks, usually the Korean congregation included Kim-Chee, the specialty Korean dish of spicy, garlicky fermented cabbage for the pot luck table. Because of the spicy and strong flavor of Kim-Chee, the Anglo congregation were hesitant to try the Kim-Chee. Then, the minister of the Anglo congregation opened

his mouth and encouraged them by saying, "You know that this Korean congregation is on fire for God. They are all going to go to heaven by their hot faith! Because their favorite dish is Kim-Chee, I am fairly certain that God will provide Kim-Chee on the heavenly table, so the rest of us had better taste it here and be prepared to be accustomed to the Kim-Chee in heaven!" "There is no Kim-Chee no food" Korean saying. There is a Jewish saying "Without wine there is no joy" In the church there is Feast of Word of the Lord; Word of faith, of hope and of love.

The Feast is a symbol of wedding fellowship. The early Christian church had a feast every day. In doing so, there were wonders and miraculous signs done among them. They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Lastly, worship and fellowship is not the end. There is another thing to do in the church. Following Christ includes belonging, not just believing. We are members of His body - the church. Paul explains the mystical union that exists between Christ and his church, and the relationship between the church and Christ in the image of the wedding.

We experience fellowship at Faith Church through our coffee hour and refreshment following the worship service. But, in the setting of a wedding ceremony, fellowship means more than that. To be a Christian is not just to believe, also to be called by God to be a member of God's family. The Bible says we are put together, joined together, built together, to be members together, to be heirs together, fitted together, and held together and will be caught up together. (1 Cor.12:12)

A marriage begins a new family. It is interesting that when God created man and woman God initiated the institution of marriage.(Gen 2:24) "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." The House of Cana is where a wedding was held and blessed by the presence of Jesus and the performing of his first miracle. Because marriage is as important as God's purpose of creation, Jesus participated in the wedding.

Jesus began His ministry, His life's work, at a wedding. They say, "Actions speak louder than words," and by this action, Jesus was saying that families are important!

Humans need families to live with. God said, "It is not good for man to be alone." Family is the primary support group for an individual. But, humans also have had many mal-functional families throughout history. The church is the place which recovers mal-functional families and heals loneliness in life. A marriage is not easy at all. It is easy to break and hurt and destroy.

A son asked, "Is it true? Dad, I heard that in ancient China, a man doesn't know his wife until he marries" Father replied, "That happens everywhere, son, everywhere!" There is no completely successful system of marriage in any culture.

In the Bible, Paul shows that there is a new, eternal family. You are members of

God's very own family, citizens of God's country, and you belong in God's household with every other Christian. (Ephesians 2:19) Today's culture of independent individualism has created many spiritual orphans.

God's family is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.(1 Timothy 3:15b)

For the early Christians, church was the family of God. There was sharing and caring and holding and supporting among the believers. All the believers' possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Act 2:42-47)

In the book "Jesus Son of Man," Gibran explains the miracle of the house of Cana. "And now even to this day in our village and in the village near by, the word of our guest is still remembered. And they say, "The spirit of Jesus of Nazareth is the best and the oldest wine." Worship, fellowship and binding family is the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth. The spirit of Jesus is the best and oldest wine that changes our life. The change of one's life is the wonderful miracle in the world. I believe that this miracle will be occurred among us during our worshipping gathering in 2009.