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## JESUS LAUGHED

I think worship should be enjoyable—even fun.

- Not everyone agrees with me, however.

When I was on internship, one pastor who helped me in many ways, insisted that the sermon should not contain any jokes or funny stories.

- My response to him was that he was probably right.
  - “After all, if GOD wanted us to laugh in church, GOD would have given us a sense of humor.”

A member of another church I served demanded that worship maintain “proper decorum.”

- Believe me, I’ve been to plenty of worship services that had proper decorum, but were not in any way enjoyable.

So, while I truly believe worship is important and, of course, we do want to be respectful of GOD,

- I think GOD wants us to not take worship too seriously.

In this season of Epiphany, we are reminded that we have a GOD who knows what it is to be human.

- Because of JESUS, GOD knows what it is to play and have fun.
- The Old Testament talks about success, but only in battle; instead, the rest of the Bible talks about, among other things, joy—237 times!
  - GOD want us to experience joy and have appropriate laughter, and why not even in worship?

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It’s easy to get caught up in making worship and anything related to JESUS somber and subdued.

- Perhaps that’s because of His suffering and death.
- Maybe it’s because of our sinfulness (which, by the way, JESUS’ suffering and death took away).
- Certainly, the Bible records some very serious and even dark things occurring in or surrounding JESUS’ life:
  - casting out demons;
  - angrily chasing out those who misused the temple;
  - wrestling Satan in the Garden before His arrest;
  - even weeping over the death of a friend.

Nevertheless, one thing that the Bible neglects to tell us that I think it should is that JESUS also like to have fun and even that JESUS laughed.

- I’m sure HE did and I think we can infer it from a number of passages:
  - JESUS played with children, and how can you do so without laughing?
  - JESUS nicknamed Simon “Peter,” which means “rock”, and then told the Rock to walk on water;
  - JESUS joked with Nathaniel, after he made fun of JESUS’ hometown (“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”), by shooting back, “Oh, here finally is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”
  - And for that matter, if you want proof that JESUS had a sense of humor, look at the group of people JESUS chose to be His disciples.

JESUS went to dinners, and today, a wedding.

- JESUS liked to go to parties, and I believe that JESUS liked to laugh.

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Perhaps my favorite picture of JESUS is this one of HIM laughing.

- Can't you just imagine JESUS chuckling, and giggling, and even tipping His head back and roaring with laughter?
- JESUS laughed and I think this wedding story is just one more place that we might find this to be true.

To set the stage, let me give a bit of Bible background to help us better understand JESUS and this party HE attended.

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Weddings were places to have fun.

- The bridegroom throws the party, with lots of food to eat and wine to drink, and the whole town is invited to come.
- The party would go on for three days, during which time, the bride and the groom retire to the backroom to consummate the marriage.
  - If they don't after three days, there is no marriage, but once they do, they come out and join in the celebrating.
    - In fact, their reappearance becomes a point for some fun and a bit of teasing, but also for even greater celebration.

This wedding, though, runs out of wine.

- Running out of food would be a point of great embarrassment for the groom as the host.
- Running out of wine would be a catastrophe.

The stone jars that are present may also need a bit of explanation.

- Every household kept special jars for the religious washing rituals that followed those things that would make you unclean:
  - contact with Gentiles or unclean animals;
  - being too near to someone who was sick;
  - seeing someone other than a close family member undressed;
  - touching blood, whether yours or someone else's.
    - When King David saw Bathsheba bathing on her roof, she was probably cleansing herself following her menstrual period.

So, these six large jars in today's Gospel had been brought in so that the wedding guests could cleanse themselves, and not contaminate the wedding.

- That's what's going on here, and it is in this story that JESUS has some fun with both the bride and groom, and His mother, and with us.

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This wedding runs out of wine.

- Mary, JESUS' mother, goes to JESUS, not just to report the bad news to HIM, or shake her head about this groom, but basically to tell HIM to fix it.
  - Clearly, she must have some idea of that of which HE is capable.
- But JESUS says that it is not yet time for HIM to reveal who HE truly is: "MY time has not yet come."
  - And what does Mary then do?
  - She tells the servants to do what HE tells them, leaving JESUS, not a choice, but almost command to act.

Can't you see JESUS just rolling HIS eyes and saying, "Okay, Mother. Whatever you want."

- And then I imagine that JESUS laughed.
  - "I thought I was the MESSIAH, but you're going to get your way, aren't you, Mom?"

And the wine that HE makes out of the water in the jars is the best the wine the banquet master has ever tasted.

- So, the banquet master goes to the groom and compliments him on his generosity and classiness in saving the best wine for last.
- Not only did JESUS provide excellent wine as a wedding gift, but probably status in the town for the groom for some time to come.
  - Surely the banquet master would make this known throughout the community about this man's sophistication and discrimination in his timing of the wine presentation.
- And as the impressed banquet master and the befuddled groom taste the wine and talk about it, I'll bet JESUS watched from off to the side, and JESUS laughed.

It is in these actions that JESUS tells us something about HIMSELF and, from the very beginning, a very important truth is revealed.

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JESUS is really teaching us about GOD's grace.

- Grace, of course, is one of those words that, while central to our theological identity and vocabulary, is often hard for us to define, let alone describe to someone else.
- Often, we use words like, "generosity" or "free gift" to explain it.
- But here, JESUS reminds us that grace also means "abundance."
  - In fact, really a more-than-you-can-possibly-imagine abundance.
    - In those six 20-30-gallon jars, there would be close to a thousand bottles of additional wine.
    - Not only that, but the best wine this town had ever tasted!

What JESUS is telling us here is that this is what grace is like: an overflowing joy, blessing, and the presence of GOD>>>

- something so delightful and wonderful that you can't help but laugh.

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You know, in the Bible as in many other places, first things matter.

- Mark describes the first thing done by JESUS in His professional ministry as the casting out of a demon.
- Luke, as we will hear in a couple of weeks, reports that the first thing JESUS did was preach a sermon of release and freedom and healing.
  - Each of these things matter and indeed are acts of grace.
- But John chooses to describe this as the first thing that JESUS did and to illustrate this godly grace as providing more wine, joy, and blessing than this couple—or any couple for that matter—could possibly have imagined or deserved.

Because this is what grace looks like.

- Grace isn't just about making up for something we lack.
  - It also is providing more than we could ever imagine or deserve.
- Think about it.
  - JESUS could have provided just enough wine for the party to go on, and just your run-of-the-mill Chianti, given that everyone had already drunk up all the wine that had been there to begin with.
    - And that even this would have been gratefully received.

But JESUS went way, way beyond expectations to provide more and better wine than they ever could have hoped for.

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- Why? Because that's what grace looks like. And that's how GOD is.
  - And GOD wants us to know that what we receive today as we come together again, and as we dine at this table again, and as we receive HIM again into our lives,
    - is just a foretaste, a sampling, of the bigger-than-you-can-imagine blessings that awaits us, and that are already available to us, and that, truth be told, surprisingly, joyfully, graciously come to us when we least expect it.
    - And that what we have and what we share is not even close to what GOD is ready and willing to give.

And I think that there is one more reason why JESUS gives this brimming-to-the-top-and-overflowing, more-than-we-can-fit-into-our-pockets-and-purses-and lives, greater-than-you-can-possibly-hope-for-or-imagine grace.

- I think it's because JESUS wants us to celebrate and party together and enjoy all that life with GOD brings;
- to have fun and be surprised whenever we see GOD doing something amazing in our lives and our world;
- to discover that GOD does indeed brings us grace-upon-grace again and again and again.
  - And I think each time this happens, JESUS is standing off to the side watching and enjoying the surprise, and pleasure, and delight on our faces, and that He is laughing.
    - I think it is as true today as it was back then, because I believe that JESUS laughed!