

Let's Go Crazy
Sunday, November 14, 2021, 11:30 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Mike Kinman

Dearly beloved
We are gathered here today
To get through this thing called "life"

Electric word, life
It means forever and that's a mighty long time
But I'm here to tell you
There's something else,
The afterworld

A world of never ending happiness
You can always see the sun, day or night

So when you call up that shrink in Beverly Hills
You know the one, Dr. Everything'll-Be-Alright
Instead of asking him how much of your time is left
Ask him how much of your mind, baby

Cause in this life
Things are much harder than in the afterworld
In this life,
You're on your own

And if the elevator tries to bring you down
Go crazy

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Weddings and funerals.
 Weddings and funerals.

If you want to see the total spectrum of human behavior and pathology.
 If you want to see the depth of repression and the height of unhinged.
 If you want to see deep wailing and furious dancing.

Weddings and funerals.
 Weddings and funerals.

Weddings and funerals are liminal places ... in between places. They are places of life and death. Of death in the midst of new life. Of new life in the midst of heart wrenching death.

Sometimes we cry at weddings, and sometimes we laugh at funerals. The membranes that keep our feelings locked inside become semi-permeable if not disappear altogether.

Even Episcopalians. Even Episcopalians are known to shed a tear or crack a smile at weddings and funerals.

Every time I preside at a wedding or a funeral. And I mean every time. As I am talking with the readers at least one of them will say the same thing.

I don't know if I can make it through this. I'm afraid I might cry.

Then cry ... I say.

Cry. Laugh. If it is coming naturally from you, just let it happen.

Because we've all been to those weddings and funerals. And we know that the moments that are the deepest, the holiest, the moments that touch our heart in the most profound ways are the moments when the voice cracks and the tears come ... not because it is planned but because it isn't.

Because the power of our humanity in a moment overpowers our pathological desire to pretend we aren't human.

The reality that we are not in control in a moment overpowers our pathological desire to pretend we've got it all together.

So many of us ... and I'm at the top of the list ... live in fear that we will be naked before the judge like Pink in The Wall saying we were caught red-handed showing feelings ... showing feelings of an almost human nature.

...And that this will not do.

And yet in these holy moments, the fear crumbles in the face of the love. In the face of the passion. In the face of our need to have life be more than just form and function. Our need to connect, to mourn, to sing, to dance.

This morning's Gospel finds Jesus at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Now to understand this story, first we have to understand that unlike the three to four-hour celebration we experience today, in the time of Jesus, the wedding feast lasted at least a week.

It began with a procession through the town to the home of the groom where the couple would be joined. Then the celebration would begin, and it would go on and on and on and on through sunrises and sunsets and all the days and nights in between.

Finally, with great fanfare the couple would go off to consummate the marriage ... and after that much celebrating, you could be sure they weren't the only ones!

But we hadn't gotten there yet. This was the feast. A weeklong celebration of eating and drinking and singing and dancing. Yes ... dancing. Of course, there was dancing – because we are made in God's image as embodied creatures.

And our bodies were made to feel.

Our bodies were made to move – separately and even more gloriously together.

And those movements are meant to make us feel.

And watching each other move is meant to make us feel. To make us want someone to hold us and wait for something more.

George Michael was right ... that is a part of faith.

And those feelings are not only good and holy, they are necessary. They are a deep part of our humanity that should never be denied.

"But ... I can't dance!" How many of us say that? How many of us live in fear of being Elaine Benes on Seinfeld ... having everyone secretly point and laugh as they watch us dance.

There is a reason they say "dance like nobody is watching" ... and that's wrong ... truly we need to dance as if everyone is watching and being proud of our movements, not ashamed. Because our dancing is beautiful. YOUR dancing is beautiful.

We all can dance. I have danced with people on their hundredth birthday. I have seen people in wheelchairs and walkers tear up dance floors. I have seen people groove and move when they can't even hear the music.

We all can dance. Just not all of us know it. For some of us it takes a lifetime or more to realize that we have been dancing all along.

I have never heard this more beautifully put than Alice Walker writes in the forward to her book "Hard Times Require Furious Dancing." She writes:

"I have learned to dance.

"It isn't that I didn't know how to dance before; everyone in my community knew how to dance, even those with several left feet. I just didn't know how basic it is for maintaining balance. That Africans are always dancing (in their ceremonies and rituals) shows an awareness of this.

“It struck me one day, while dancing, that the marvelous moves African Americans are famous for on the dance floor came about because the dancers, especially in the old days, were contorting away various knots of stress.

“Some of the lower-back movements handed down to us that have seemed merely sensual were no doubt created after a day’s work bending over a plow or hoe on a slave driver’s plantation.

“Wishing to honor the role of dance in the healing of families, communities, and nations, I hired a local hall and a local band and invited friends and family from near and far to come together, on Thanksgiving, to dance our sorrows away, or at least to integrate them more smoothly into our daily existence.

“The next generation of my family, mourning the recent death of a mother, my sister-in-law, created a spirited line dance that assured me that, though we have all encountered our share of grief and troubles, we can still hold the line of beauty, form, and beat — no small accomplishment in a world as challenging as this one. Hard times require furious dancing. Each of us is the proof.”

The lives of the people at the wedding feast were hard. They lived under occupation. Their work was hard, and the future was uncertain. You can bet there was furious dancing at that wedding feast in Cana.

How they danced in the courtyard, sweet summer sweat.
Some danced to remember, some danced to forget
And then Mary called up the Captain,
“Please bring me my wine.”

And no, he didn’t say, “We haven’t had that spirit here since 1969”
He said the wine has run out ... all we have is these six stone jars.

And Mary called Jesus over. Now if Jesus thought the dancing, the feasting, the celebration was a bad thing. If he thought it was sinful. If he was standing in judgment over it ... and if he was non confrontational ... he could have used this as an opportunity to let the party die out. But he didn’t ... he used it as an opportunity to say this is good. He didn’t shut it down, he said: more ... more ... more.

And not just more ... but even better.

The best wine.

The most passionate celebration.

Times were hard.

And hard times require furious dancing.

Jesus was no wallflower. He didn't shy away from condemnation and confrontation when he saw it was necessary. He wasn't afraid of offending anyone or speaking his mind and heart when people were behaving in ways that were immoral or unjust.

It's just that this wasn't one of those moments.

Jesus reserved his condemnation and confrontation for the church that had forgotten how to dance.

The church that tried to dominate and control.

The church that taxed you until you couldn't feed your families.

That cozied up to empire instead of standing up to it.

That said that women were property and sex was only ok when it had been blessed by them and met their standards that were not about celebration and liberation but about securing their own power.

The stone jars Jesus had filled with water that he then turned into the finest of wine were for the rites of purification. But for Jesus, purity wasn't a tool of domination and control like it was for the religious authorities.

For Jesus, purity wasn't a way to make us ashamed of and repress our sexuality, our longings, our passions and our deepest needs.

For Jesus purity is creating a space where we can let those out and be fully honest about who we are and who we are becoming, who we love and whom we long for and how deeply we long to be longed for.

For Jesus purity is not some spotless standard of perfection but the purity of the reader's voice cracking with tears at the memorial service

...the purity of the joyful embrace of two who have found the healing they need in the intertwining of their bodies

...or the one who finds healing in their own movement, in their own body, in their own fully feeling what is welling up inside them without filter or shame.

Nadia Bolz-Weber writes:

“Many of us were taught that if you do not fit inside the circle of the church’s behavioral codes, God is not pleased with you, so we whittled ourselves down to a shape that could fit those teachings, or we denied those parts of ourselves entirely. Our purity systems, even those established with the best of intentions, do not make us holy. They only create insiders and outsiders.”

That is not the Jesus of this wedding feast ... or the rest of his life ... or his dreams for us.

Jesus is a healer.

Jesus is a lover.

Jesus is a dancer.

The revolutionary Jesus I know dances on tables with her heels in her hand and stumbles back home as the sun creeps over the horizon.

The revolutionary Jesus I know dances furiously, seductively, with abandon, with joy.

The revolutionary Jesus I know knows the feelings that come with dancing and that come from watching each other dance can be scary because they are so powerful ... and that is precisely why they are holy.

Those feelings, those passions are part of us being created in God’s image. They invite us not to fear them and wall them off, but to dive deeply into them ... to see the body dancing and not just the body. To see the whole person. To be astounded by their beauty and our own. And to be moved by our passion for each other in ways that are no less powerful and are in fact more powerful when they respect each other’s autonomy and touch one another only with mutual enthusiastic consent.

When was the last time you danced?

Has it been hours?

Days?

Months?

Years?

Has it been too long?

Are you ready to dance again?

It has been 20 months of social distancing and mask-breathing and avoiding being crammed together for fear of bring harm to ourselves of each other. Love has looked very different these past two years. The times are hard ... and hard times require furious dancing.

When was the last time you danced?

Has it been too long?

Are you ready to dance again?

Or maybe even for the first time?

Well now is the time. Because Jesus is here, and Jesus loves a good party. And Jesus is on the dance floor. And Jesus doesn't want you to dance like nobody is watching ... Jesus is holding his hand out and inviting you to dance knowing everybody is watching ... because any way you move is beautiful ... because there are no mistakes, only different choices ... because, as Alice Walker says, we have to start to live differently or we will die the same old ways.

Jesus is standing on the dance floor. And he is longing for us to join him. And the wedding is about to begin (cue music):

And someone hands Jesus a mic and he says:

"Dearly beloved
We are gathered here today
To get through this thing called "life"

Electric word, life
It means forever and that's a mighty long time
But I'm here to tell you
There's something else,
The afterworld

A world of never ending happiness
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So when you call up that shrink in Beverly Hills
You know the one, Dr. Everything'll-Be-Alright
Instead of asking him how much of your time is left
Ask him how much of your mind, baby

Cause in this life
Things are much harder than in the afterworld
In this life,

You're on your own

And if the elevator tries to bring you down
Go crazy (Punch a higher floor!)

Woo!

If you don't like
The world you're living in
Take a look around
At least you got friends

You see I called my old lady
For a friendly word
She picked up the phone
Dropped it on the floor
(Ah-s ah-s) is all I heard

Are we gonna let the elevator bring us down?
Oh, no lets go!

Let's go crazy
Let's get nuts
Let's look for the purple banana
Until they put us in the truck, let's go!

We're all excited
But we don't know why
Maybe it's cause
We're all gonna die

And when we do (When we do)
What's it all for (What's it all for)
You better live now
Before the grim reaper come knocking on your door

Tell me, are we gonna let the elevator bring us down?
Oh, no let's go!

Let's go crazy
Let's get nuts
Look for the purple banana
Until they put us in the truck, let's go!

C'mon baby
Let's get nuts!
Yeah
(Crazy)

Let's go crazy!

Are we gonna let the elevator bring us down?
Oh, no let's go!
Go (Go crazy)

I said let's go crazy (go crazy)
Let's go (Let's go!)
Go (Let's go!)

Dr. Everything'll-Be-Alright
Will make everything go wrong
Pills and thrills and daffodils will kill
Hang tough children

He's comin'
He's comin'
Comin'

Take me away!"

Amen!