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August 16, 2009

Text: Ephesians 5:15-20

Pentecost 11

### IT IS TIME TO PARTY!

How about a party? You like parties? Birthday parties? Retirement parties? Back to school parties? End of school parties? Halloween parties? Christmas parties? New Year's Eve parties?

What's the best party you ever attended? What made it so good? The people who were there? The costumes? The food? The drinks? The games?

Do you know that God loves a party? Do you know that one of the dreams that God has for the church involves a party? God dreams of a church that parties! It is true.

The last few weeks we have been talking about the dreams God has for the church. The New Testament book of Ephesians has been our guide. This brief letter, written by the Apostle Paul to Christians living in the city of Ephesus, lays out God's vision for the church. The reading for today is about a party and if we listen carefully we hear that God wants the church to party.

The reading talks about singing and making melody. It talks about giving thanks and being filled with the Spirit. Oh, that's worship, you're probably thinking. And you're right. It is worship. But worship is intended to be a party. It is getting together with other folks, telling stories, eating and drinking, singing and making melody.

But our worship doesn't seem like a party, you're probably thinking. Its so somber and serious, and some of you may add - so boring. A party, though, doesn't depend on any one thing to make it good. You wouldn't say, it's a good party only if there is Dr. Pepper. Or, it's a good party only if there is country music. Or, it's a good party only if there is ballroom dancing. No, the success of a party doesn't depend so much on what is done as much as it depends on the spirit of the party. Right?

I am reminded of a story about a Teacher and his students. "Why is it that so few people understood Jesus?" a student asked the Teacher. "The Pharisees and scribes constantly opposed him. His disciples often seemed confused by his teaching, and still others insisted he was possessed with demons."

The Teacher replied, "Once there was a wedding couple who brought in the finest fiddlers and banjo players to entertain their guests immediately after the ceremony. The music was so captivating that soon everyone, young and old alike, began to dance. The people flung their bodies first one way and then another. The church was filled with joy."

The Teacher continued. "Two men happened to drive by the church building in their new luxury automobile with the windows of the car rolled up and loud music blaring from their CD player. They could not hear a single sound from outside the automobile. When they saw people jumping around in the church, they stopped the car, hoping their heads at the sight. 'What a bunch of wierdos,' the driver said to his companion. 'See how they fling themselves about. I tell you the folks that go to that church are crazy.'"

The Teacher paused after finishing his story. "That is the conclusion people draw when they cannot hear the music to which others are dancing."

Do you hear the music at God's party? Do you hear the music that is giving people cause for joy? It is not a particular style of worship. It is not a favorite hymn. It is not the place where people gather. It is not the time of the day. It is rather the music the Spirit of God is making.

And that music is so sweet, so wonderful, so empowering. The music is the sound of a baby's cry coming from a manger in a barn. It is the sound a voice calling out, "follow me." It is the sound of parables and stories. It is the sound a crippled person walking down the street. It is the sound of hungry people being fed. It is the sound of nails being pounded into a cross. It is the sound a grave opening up. It is the sound of mighty rushing wind and tongues of fire.

Oh, I tell you, this music is sweet, it is wonderful, it is empowering. It is the sound of water splashing at the font. It is the sound of bread savored and swallowed. It is the sound of unconditional forgiveness. It is the sound of faithful promises. It is the sound of sure and certain hope. It is the sound of unrelenting love. It is the sound of new life.

It is the music of God, and when you hear the music, you know you are at a party, you know that you are at God's party, and you are filled with joy, and you sing and you make melody. God dreams of a church that parties! Not just now and then, but often, weekly, without ceasing.

God dreams of a church that parties! Just as God dreams of a church that is bold to live in ways that make a difference in the world. Just as God dreams of a church that uses their gifts and talents and time and energy for the good of all. Just as God dreams of a church growing and developing and becoming all that God created it to be. Just as God dreams of a church that is united together, a sign of God's plan to unite all creation through Jesus Christ.

Yes, God has great dreams for the church. And you know what the best part of those dreams is? The best part is that you are part of those dreams!