

“The More You Pray, the More You Win!”

[Text - John 2:1-11]

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O.K. It's truth time. This past week, how many of you bought at least one lottery ticket? Sure, why not? Think of all the wonderful things you could do with that money... choose any charity, give to the poor, tithe to your church! But here's the real "kicker": Last year Americans spent over 70 *billion* dollars on lottery tickets! And while for many of us, it's just an occasional, whimsical form of escapist entertainment; for others, it's like a desperate prayer and a last-ditch effort to escape their impoverished lives. Actually, it's rather sad: People with extra money tossing it away - with the notion that they would use the money they'd *win*, to help the poor [why not just use *that* money?] And poor people scraping together their few scare dollars to throw at an addictive, State-sponsored, one-in-a-million [no, one 292 million] shot at escaping poverty. But like they say, "The more you play, the more you win...."

Now before some of you get concerned that I've been infected with some kind of lottery fever, let me assure you that there is a theological point in all of this. In the Gospel according to John, the very first miracle that Jesus performs, is turning water into wine. Not a glass of wine, or a bottle, or a jug. He transforms 150 gallons of water into deliciously exquisite wine! For John, this is the first and fundamental *sign* Jesus performs, to reveal who he is and what he about to do. His mission is to turn poor, dreary, watered-down lives into lives which overflow with an abundant, deeply rich purpose and meaning - to show the world that Divine Power and Blessings are readily available to *all*!

Unfortunately, many religious, financial, and political leaders have a vested interest in keeping their powerful positions. They detest the idea of common poor people being raised-up and affirmed by this radical rabbi. So they attack Jesus for spending too much time celebrating Life, and not enough time condemning lifestyles. His warm and close association with poor fishing folk, tax collectors, prostitutes, and other social outcasts, makes Jesus a perfect target for the vindictive power-brokers of his day. They are deeply invested in protecting the religious, political, and financial status quo; and they are rightly afraid that Jesus stands resolutely in their way.

At the wedding in Cana, when Jesus' mother tells him that they've run out of wine, he says to her, "What's that got to do with you and me? *My hour has not yet come.*" The author of *John* is meticulously careful about the smallest detail in each of his stories. And here, he begins to make the connection between Jesus' extravagant outreach to those whose lives are lacking, and the increasingly vicious and violent reaction of those in power. At this point, Jesus hour has not yet come; but with this powerful sign of his willingness to pour-out his all for the poor and powerless, the countdown begins. Jesus isn't going to just *talk* about welcome and inclusion, equality and justice for the downtrodden; he is going to summon every human and Divine resource at his disposal to make that dream a reality. Jesus will live his life, even give his life, to help bring-about the Divine Realm of Compassion and Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.

Probably the most celebrated words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. are from his "I Have a Dream" speech, spoken from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. These words are echoed in King's 1967 Christmas sermon, delivered four months before his life was cut short by an assassin's bullet. Like Jesus, King recognizes the dangers of standing-up to the rich and powerful, for the sake of the poor and vulnerable. Yet they both realize that the overflowing

abundance of Divine Blessing is intended for *all* people. Martin Luther King doesn't just "dream" of a vague notion of a redeemed and reconciled society; he sees it as a realistic, achievable, and essential goal. His vision is grounded in the belief that our Sacred Source intends for everyone to have - and to share - the basic physical, emotional, and spiritual necessities of Life. And King realizes that this Divine Reality can only be possible when the societal systems of inequality and oppression are removed and replaced.

Martin Luther King resolutely renounces injustice in all of its toxic forms: Segregation in housing and education, in places of commerce and in places of worship; Oppression and violence based on racial prejudice and fearful ignorance; Economic inequity which systematically keeps some people hopelessly trapped at the bottom, and allows others to comfortably control things from the top. King dreamed of and desired what many of us also claim to want: a kinder, more fair and compassionate nation; and a safer, more peaceful and prosperous world. Many people said then, as they do now, "This simply can't be done. It isn't realistic. We just don't have enough resources." O really? What about that 150 gallons of fine wine? Or the money rich CEO's spend to stock the wine cabinets in their private jets? How about the 70 billion dollars we spend each year on lottery tickets? It's not that we or our nation or our world are running low on basic resources; it's that we're running low on basic compassion and courage, hope and integrity, inspiration and *faith*.

Some would have us believe, "The More You *Play*, the More You Win." I personally believe, "The More You *Pray*, the More You Win!" The more we *all* win! Jesus Christ, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa - countless men and women of faith - remind us of the awesome abundance that is provided by our Sacred Source. And the more you and I prayerfully reflect upon their lives, and remember their self-giving actions, the more we will be prepared

to graciously act and generously give. Today, you and I share in the overflowing blessings of this Faith Community, as we joyfully share together the Bread and Cup of Holy Communion. It is for us *all*, and there's plenty for everyone! It is a powerful and palpable reminder of the One who freely gives his all for the sake of the world. The one who inspires us to give our all, in loving service to others. The more we do this, the greater the odds that everybody wins!