

GETTING THE PICTURE

By now, most New Year's resolutions have been broken,.... or never attempted. New Year's resolutions usually end with frustration and disappointment, and so they are about as much fun as attending a wedding banquet that runs out of refreshments.

The wedding Jesus, his mother Mary and his disciples were attending ran out of wine....way to soon. This social blunder set the stage for what the Gospel of John calls, Jesus' "first sign."

For some reason, Mary was quite bothered by the lack of wine, and implied to Jesus that he use his special talents and fix the problem.

Obviously perturbed, Jesus responds to his mother by saying, "Woman",not mother or mom, ... but "Woman."

"Woman, what concern is that to you and me?".....--a good question.
And, "My hour has not yet come."

Mary, was still his mother, and she overruled him, and Jesus ended up making some very fine wine. Not, just wine, but "good wine."

This exchange impressed me in two ways, and they are both related.

First, Mary, in essence said to Jesus, NO, your time is NOW. You are who you are; be true to yourself, Now.

The second is that Jesus made impressively "good wine."

Jesus revealed himself when he created the wine.

There are risks in pouring ourselves into something, and they include surprises and failures.

Every since the industrial revolution introduced mass-production, we have come to tolerant, even expect "consistency" and conformity, and with that comes a distaste for failure and surprises.

McDonalds established the fast food industry by selling hamburgers that always taste the same, no matter when or where they are sold.

However, there is a profound down side to that, which I learned when I was 18 years old.

During high school and few months afterwards, I worked at Kentucky Fried Chicken. I learned to bread and cook chicken the old fashioned way--by hand, yet the final product wasn't consistent.

A person could produce some wondrously, thickly breaded pieces, cooked to perfection,...the way Colonel Sanders intended..... or..... some bare skinned over or under cooked pieces.

Customers had been conditioned to expect consistency, so,...just before I moved on, the company placed new breading and cooking machines in all their outlets. Those machines produced an average product the same way, all the time. The produce was good, never bad, but never great.

Since then, I try not to eat KFC..... because I know how much better it could be,..... which comes with a risk.

Those new coffee pod machines are another example. They make the same cup every time. I'm told it's good coffee, but they steal the joy, the art..... and the risk of hand crafting coffee. And, because of that, they can Never be great.

A person poured out in the moment / in the now is required for the surprise "great."
There is something magical about a person investing in the moment.

I doubt we'd watch hockey if it was played by robots, consistently every time. Fans want goals, and they hope to see some magic, too--a knew move..... or an amazing shot -- a surprise!

Life / living can be compared to the art of photography.

There are three aspects to photography:

One is the future--camera in hand, envisioning, planning, framing the picture to be taken. That's the vision, and it is different from a dream.

A dream is merely contemplating a picture, without any action.

Two is taking the picture / deciding to press the button. This is the NOW moment.

The third aspect is putting the picture into a time capsule mode - the photo. At that point, it becomes a historical record. It is good to recall the past, but..... we can't live in a photo.

The critical part / moment is pressing that button to capture the image. It's easier now days with digital cameras; there's not the burden of running out of film.... and also of not knowing the result until the film was developed. Still, it requires an intentional decision to push that button,..... unless you're like me.... and do it accidentally. And, then "that" planned "moment" produces a surprise.....

Ever since we've had a digital camera, Katherine enjoyed taking lots and lots of pictures, and she still does.

Sometimes, there are 40, 50, 60 or more pictures recorded on the camera when I go to use it.

I'd ask her, "Do you want me to print any them?", and she'd usually answer, "No."

Taking picture without printing them out used to puzzle me, until I realized what was going on.

Katherine likely has a vision of the picture she wants to take, but the appealing part was capturing the moment / of creating the image.... not for historical purposes, but simply to engage in the creative, imaginative moment -- the Now.

Her "now" photographic work produced, a few excellent images,... many... so, so ones..... and lots of..... well..... interesting pictures.

But, that didn't matter. It's the joy of the moment / of making that image that was important.

This process is art.

We tend to think of art as only the final product, and generally we confine art to what is in a museum.

I remember one time, commenting while looking at a simplistic painting in a gallery, "I could have done that."

To which, the person I was with responded, "But you didn't."

Photography is art. It is applying self and creating something, and the key part is in the doing. Art doesn't become art only if the final product is admired. Art is a person creatively, pouring self out.

Living / real, vibrant, joyous living is art.

Yet,.....there are risks in doing art / in living in the NOW.

Living as art makes us very vulnerable.... because people will see us for who we are,..... just as Jesus was revealed when he made wine.

We could mess up or fail, and there is surprise. Good or bad, there is surprise in art. So, pouring ourselves out in the now requires we let go of the "myth" of control and of pretending.

It may be possible to control the production of hamburgers or coffee, but we can't control our lives,..... unless we eliminate all the variables of relationships and our own weaknesses.

We need relationships, because relationship is where love grows.

Living in the Now / pouring self out in the now / living as art means

--accepting failure and surprise; it means letting go of control

Engaging self in the now demands a decision to do just that, much like the decision to take a picture or move paint across a canvas.

It also requires commitment to keep in engaged, trusting all will be okay / trusting that you can be who you really are.

I believe we all, truly, want to be ourselves--no pretending or hiding.

And,..... living that way / living as art is "real", but it can be hard work. ARTWORK is called that for a reason.

It takes work,..... but the true art is in the process.... of being, creating, learning and growing.

We didn't read the I Corinthians passage, but it's in the bulletin.

That passage is about spiritual gifts / abilities / aptitude that God has given us for a purpose.

But, they are worthless unless they are used / applied.

And, that means making the decision to do it NOW, constantly now.

To be fully alive / engaged, we must decide each moment to pour ourselves into each moment. Living is constant choices.

Choosing to withhold, to play it safe is fear based,... and is life as a Big Mac -- bland,...there, but not really.

Good intentions, resolutions without actions, delaying until "ready" are only dreams and.... the trap of all addicts and victims.

It is truly sad to hear, "I should do such and such" or "I'm going to soon" or "He/she will change,..one of these days."

Moreover, there is a big difference between dreaming and having a vision.
A vision is what we see down the path we are on.

A dream is imagining that destination,... while sitting in a safe place.

We need to have visions that are pulling us, and not dreams that freeze and frustrate. Vision give us movement and hope-- both necessary for healthy living.....and....for doing relationships

After all, like it or not, life is about relationships, and that brings us to the other dimension.
Which is.... this "being fully in moment" / living as art -- pouring self out,..... is how we connect with God. It requires honest confession and expression.

The Psalm passage denotes many of the wonderful attributes of God.
God IS loving, faithful, righteous, just and so forth.
And, the text begins with identifying God as Yahweh.

In respect to Jewish tradition, the NRSV translation replaces Yahweh with the capitalized Lord.
In the Hebrew it is Yahweh, and scholars agree that Yahweh means "I am." I am is present tense -- now.
God is the "I am". Jesus frequently owned that, too -- "I am".

And, humorously, it took his mother to prod him into being him -- the living, incarnate "I am" -- love Now!

God is in the Now, and that is where and how we find and connect with God.

Yes, God gives us a vision for the future, and reminds us of the past, but we live / we are alive in the Now.

We don't know God when we are promising to do better tomorrow or relying on the past.
We find God through the decision to be openly ourselves / to live Now.

It's a relationship. It's being In love.

And, relationships, love and living just doesn't work well when we hold back and don't fully invest and reveal ourselves.

Likewise with God. God is now,.... are we, too?
We are not a masterpiece, and that is okay.

To be sure, we are not finished yet. Relationship grow with each giving moment.
Each moment in Life... we are painting a picture,..... and hopefully getting better at it.

Sometimes we our pouring out might render bitter vinegar,..... and sometimes we may be surprised
with a very fine wine.

And, that's okay. The art is in the giving of "all" of ourselves, and God is found there, too.

So Envision.....Look.....and take that picture, now,..... while the light is good.