

INTERIM THOUGHTS *How Strong Is Our Wine?*

This may be a story you have heard or read before, but it is worth hearing again. The story is about a village that was living through an extended period of prosperity. However, the prosperity itself was not without its stresses. And it was especially difficult for the poorer members of the village. The village was becoming more and more grim and preoccupied as people sought to keep up with it all.

The village priest observed all this and became concerned. It seemed that the note of gratefulness, appreciation, and celebration had become almost muted in the life of the village. He decided to call for a festival to celebrate the goodness of their lives, the blessings of friendship, and the promise of God's care. All he asked in preparation for the festival was that each household bring a bottle of wine to pour into the common barrel that would stand at the center of the festival and from which all would drink.

One by one the families came, reaching high to tip their casks up over the edge and into the large wine barrel in the center of the village square. Unbeknownst to the others a family poured water into the barrel instead of wine, thinking, "It won't matter, with only one part of water in so large a barrel." They felt they really needed their wine to meet their quota at market the next week and continue improving their lives.

Unbeknownst to the others, another family diluted their wine by half. "It won't matter," they told themselves. Still another family brought a whole case of wine, but only one-third of the bottles actually had wine in them. The rest were filled with water. "It won't matter," they mused, "because there are so many others." A poor family brought its lone bottle of wine, which it had been saving for just such a special occasion. On the way, for fear of being slighted, they drank half the bottle themselves. "It won't matter," they thought, "considering what the more fortunate can bring."

The festival reached its climactic moment. The priest opened the tap to fill the first festive glass of wine and, as you've guessed, an almost clear liquid filled the glass. So many of the villagers had substituted water for wine, from anxiety about having enough for their own needs, that one could barely detect the flavor of wine, let alone the punch of it.

The lesson, like the "wine," is clear: What each of us brings to the festival of our life-together in worship, learning, fellowship, service . . . matters.

Let this mind be in us, which was also in Christ Jesus.... (Phil. 2:5-11)

Pastor Jerry