

Reflection: And Now for Something Completely Different.... (featuring 'Fat Tuesday Word Jazz') January 17, 2009

I'll be honest. I really wasn't sure about what I'm about to share with you this morning. It's of a completely different style, and a very different context from our own. But it has important resonances for our own life here in the Western communities, and I think it provides an interesting take on the story of Jesus at the Cana wedding – an approach that also goes well with a day our neighbours to the South are honouring – a day to remember the work of their home-grown prophet, Martin Luther King, Jr. Perhaps with that in mind, the poem can take on new meaning. It also embodies a call to action – a call which may be especially relevant, given the disaster of the past week.

So, with apologies to those who actually come from the kind of urban American context the poem was written for, here's my attempt at conveying Jim Burklo's spoken word piece – otherwise known as performance poetry. Just a little note: Fat Tuesday is, of course, Mardi Gras – a day of abundance and even excess; Ash Wednesday is the first Sunday in Lent – a day of penitence and confession.

Fat Tuesday Word Jazz

Jim Burklo, from "Birdlike and Barnless: Meditations, Prayers and Songs for Progressive Christians. www.jimburlko.com Book available through <http://www.tpc.org> (waiting for information where to obtain it in Canada). Copyright 2008, Jim Burklo. Used by permission.

From Fat Tuesday
To Ash Wednesday
From California Housing Boom Tuesday
To Wall Street Stock Market Bust Wednesday
From Inauguration Tuesday
To Deflation Wednesday
From Prosperity Tuesday
To Disparity Wednesday
From Stock Options Tuesday
To Bank Failure Wednesday
From Brad and Angelina Tuesday
To Hurricane Katrina Wednesday
From Fine Wine Tuesday
To Bottom of the Barrel Wednesday

From greed
To bleed
From Trump
To slump

But that was yesterday's news
Today's is deeper blues
"De mala a Guatemala"
From bad to Guatemala –

It's the Mexicans' verse
When things go south -
From bad to worse
From worse to the hearse?
From stimulus package
To economic wreckage?
From sleeping on the car seat
To camping on the back street?
From homeful to houseless
From penniful to penniless

Fat Tuesday,
Ash Wednesday,
Bull market,
Bear market,
Buy high,
Sell low?
How did this imbroglio
Tear up my portfolio?
High and Fast Tuesday
Low and Slow Wednesday,
Endangered Tuesday,
Extinct Wednesday.

It's a massive asset erasah
From Cana to Costa Mesa

So in our need for hope for survival
It's time to turn the pages of the Bible
To the wedding in Cana in the land near Galilee
Where Jesus and his mom enjoyed festivity
Noshing on the free eats
Eating on the free treats
Sipping on the red wine
Having quite a swell time
"Hey, bartender, can you top off my glass
What's that you say? There's no wine in the flask?
Ran out so soon? That's so low-class!"

The crowd at the wedding
Lounged on the bedding
Watched CNN and PBS
ABC and CBS
About CFO's and CEO's
IOU's and HMO's
Waited for refills
Waited for bailout packages
Waited for stimulus checks
Waited for debt consolidation
Waited for mortgage restructuring
Waited for responses to their resumes

Waited for emails from personnel departments

Midnight rolled around
No more wine was found
Tuesday the party popped
Wednesday the party flopped
Jesus said "Let's go
Come on, Mom, let's blow."

But Mary told him "No!
It isn't time to go
The wine has got to flow
The people need to know
That – we can!
we can!
we can be full
we can be fillers
we can be healed
we can be healers
we can be free
we can be freers
we can be kind
we can be kinder
we can be loved
we can be lovers
we can be Love....

So make it so!"
She told her son
Who didn't want
To be the One...

"Okay, okay"
She heard him say
Beneath his breath
He was bored to death
But he did her will
And went to fill
The empty jugs
That stank of swill
That cheap red wine
That wasn't so fine

The guests were drunk
on easy credit card debt
on cheap gasoline
on plastic products
on clothes made by sweatshop labor
on SUV's, RV's, and ATV's
Drunk on glib religion
Drunk on financial derivatives
Drunk on hedge funds

Drunk on fast fried fatty fake food
on Egg McMuffins
Drunk on dead oceans and logged forests
Too drunk to adjust
When the system went bust

“Don’t be like them, son,
Lying on pillows waiting for Godot
Lounging on the linens, waiting for God!
Don’t wait, don’t be late, don’t hesitate,”
-said Mary.
“Don’t wait like somebody else will do the deed.
Indeed, you’re the deed doer!
Show them what it is like to take 100% responsibility
For things for which you might be only 1% of the cause.
Show them what it is like to take action, Jackson,
Instead of whining about HTOTB
How Things Ought To Be

Show them what it means to be an agent
Instead of a victim
Change the system
Instead of waiting for the system to give you spare change.
Did I not sing the Magnificat when you were conceived?
Is it not in revolution that we’ve always believed?”

Mary said to Jesus, “This poetry is nice
But sorry son it just will not suffice –
No time to rhyme, son,
It’s time to run, son,
You gotta work with what you’ve got.
And you’ve got a heck of a lot!
Enough of yesterday and tomorrow
Seize today, son, and run with what you’ve begun....

Jesus, “she said,
“I’m the Mother of God,
So if you’re my son,
Act the part. Get busy. Fill those jugs!
Make us some good wine....”

Mary motivated, Jesus activated.

Jesus asked the servants to fill the empty jugs with water. While that was happening, he got into a night school job retraining program and studied enology and viticulture. In the middle of the night, he planted a vineyard and took the water from the jugs and irrigated his vineyard. While the grapevines were growing and the grapes were maturing, he used his carpentry skills to build a winery and oak casks for the wine. He quickly harvested the grapes, crushed them, aged the wine in the casks, bottled the wine, and gave it to the bartenders to serve to the wedding party.

The bride and the groom
Came out of their room

Emerged from their gloom
And shared a glass...
And told the guests:
"This isn't normal!
It isn't formal!
This big faux pas
On Mardi Gras
Has changed the rules
And made us fools...
How did this come to pass?
Give us another glass!
The wine that's best
Was saved for last!"

It was the Merlot of mindfulness
It was the Syrah of sincerity
It was the Cabernet of kindness
It was the Chardonnay of social change
It was the Zinfandel of fidelity
It was the Rose' of righteousness
It was the Pinot of patience
It was Jesus' Juice of Justice....

Most of the guests went home after the wedding and said, "Jesus performed a miracle and turned the jugs of water into jugs of wine. That proves you should believe in him. When things get bad, just pray to him and ask him for another miracle while you wait on the sofa." But a few of the guests stayed after the party and asked Jesus how he did it. He told them how he did it and told them they could do it, too. He said to them what his mother said to him. "Change the system. Be an agent. Don't be a victim. Let go of yesterday. Don't get uptight about tomorrow. Work with what you've got. Be birdlike. Be barnless. I am the vine, you are the wine, don't whine, take your time, and run with what you've begun."

These few are the ones that do, and you can, too. It's true.

So let us make the besta for the lasta...
From Cana to Costa Mesa.... Amen!