

THE LIVING WORD BECAME FLESH & WALKED INTO A COCKTAIL PARTY

by Matthew Berry
<http://rawreligion.com>

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." - Matthew 28:19-20*

"Do you like blackcurrant martinis? I can also make mango." Dennis stood in his kitchen with a bottle of triple sec in his hand, a martini shaker in the other, and a bottle of Vodka sitting on the counter. Honestly, the question had taken me by surprise; not because of the offer of alcohol, but because of the context in which it was asked. Dennis had just been baptized.

Would we? Could we? The unexpected merger of things I once considered sacred and secular was taking place before my eyes. What surprised me more than this head-on collision was my response that came out so naturally that it caught me off-guard.

"Yeah, we'd love some - uh - martinis. Make 'em blackcurrant! Thanks, man."

Rewind

Last summer, was a season of change. I had changed jobs, our home was up for sale, and we were thinking about pursuing organic church life, outside the walls of what both of us were familiar. It was during this transitional time Father brought Dennis across my path. We are both contact center engineers. Cisco phone equipment is our specialty. We are in the "Thank-you-for-calling-press-one-to-speak-to-a-representative" business.

I had known Dennis from a previous job. He is a black-and-white, straight-to-the-point kind of guy. His colorful life has taken him on many adventures. Studying music at Berkeley and rubbing shoulders with biker gangs are a few of his intriguing tales.

During my first months at this new job, my friendship with Dennis had deepened. Something I found interesting about him was his unfamiliarity with the clichés and practices found in the Christian sub-culture. When we talked about God, I was forced to speak in everyday language, kindly avoiding phrases like "washed in the blood" and "asking Jesus into you heart."

It was not too long before Dennis had accepted Jesus as his Savior. He had read a small Gospel of John and responded to the gospel message on page three. The words had led him to Jesus during a difficult season of his life.

Waiting for the Fruit to Ripen

As soon as he came to Jesus, my Type-A personality took over. Several times a week, I would



encourage him to get baptized. "How about this weekend?" I would ask. "We can come to your place or you can come to ours." Whether it was my relentless salesmanship or the busyness of his life - I'm not sure - Dennis was not ready to be baptized. I was disappointed.

I had been reading about organic church life, keeping things simple and getting back to the New Testament. I wanted to be like Philip, finding people along the road, getting them saved, and then baptizing them. Move over Mr. Ford and the assembly line!

Yet, despite my best efforts to cast him as the Ethiopian steward (Acts 8) and immediately baptize him in the river off of Highway 494, Dennis showed me that he had a mind of his own. He would respond only when he was ready (if ever).

During these times, I would pour out my frustration to Father. I respected Dennis and valued our friendship, but I wanted to see results. I was impatient. My wife, reading me like a book, smiled and said, "You know what I think?"

"What?"

"You can probably guess what I'll say."

"Oh no, not the quote..." I begged.



You must understand, my wife is very proud of the following quote. A friend of hers at Bible school authored it. Ever since, it has become one of her mantras that - I admit - has great depth and wisdom.

"Remember what my friend Lindsay always says, '*Ripe fruit yields to gentle pressure.*'" Elisa let out a little smirk, proud of identifying another opportune moment to evoke the mantra.

Those words resounded in my spirit. I knew she was right. If Dennis was ever to be baptized it needed to be based on his own decision, not out of obligation or compulsion. When the fruit was ripe, it would give in. Until then, all my pressuring would be bruising fruit that was not yet ripe. I resolved that I would no longer bring up the issue of baptism. I would wait for Dennis to ask me about it.

It was immaturity on my part, you see, to expect Dennis to respond in cookie-cutter fashion to the descriptions we read of in the Book of Acts. Living organic Christianity cannot be done like one bakes a recipe. You can't just add flour, salt, and butter and then bake for 45 minutes.

The call to organic life is a call into relationship. It is a call to willingly walk alongside others at the pace they're comfortable with. It values slow progress with fellowship over blazing a trail in solitary seclusion.

A Day of Celebration

Two weeks ago, nearly six months after he accepted Jesus as his Savior, Dennis brought up the idea of getting baptized. We were standing outside as he took a smoke break, bundled up in the tundra-

like winter of Minnesota, when he said to me, "Ya, man, I think I'm ready to get baptized - maybe next weekend."

He explained how some difficult issues had recently surfaced and he realized that he needed to solidify his commitment to the Lord and have a fresh start.

That following Friday, my wife and I arrived at his apartment complex, full of excitement about how God had been working in Dennis' life. We briefly talked about the meaning of baptism, identifying with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Dennis full excited and said, "Yah man, new life, everything's done with, starting over! I'm ready!"

He was most certainly ready. No one had coerced him. He wasn't doing it to earn God's favor. He was responding in obedience because the Holy Spirit had moved on his heart. The fruit had ripened and was responding to the pressure of the Spirit. He was hearing the voice of God for himself!

We took him down to the apartment pool and baptized him. Coming up out of the water, this 49-year-old man looked like a kid again. His eyes were full of life and he said, "Whoa, man, I've got goose bumps all over and I never get those. This never happens to me!"

Alcohol and Jesus

We dried off and went upstairs to celebrate. Dennis offered us martinis and thought to myself, "What the heck? This is a great reason to celebrate!" We drank those martinis with gladness as we prayed and talked about our life in Christ. It was natural, free flowing, and completely organic. It was the culmination of a hands-off, Spirit-led journey about waiting on God for fruit to ripen.

There was no guilt or awkwardness about merging Jesus with alcohol. Instead of bringing Dennis into a rigid system of rules and behavioral norms, the good news of Jesus had been injected right into his living room. The message of salvation and freedom had, just as it had two thousand years ago, become incarnational. The living Word had "become flesh" and walked into a cocktail party.

This journey into organic Christianity is more exciting and unpredictable than I ever imagined. But the beauty is in the simplicity. Love one another without any strings attached and watch the Father ripen the harvest fields.