

Dance, Then, Wherever you May Be  
2 Samuel 6:1-5; 12b-19  
July 15, 2015  
Northminster Presbyterian

1. David makes us uncomfortable.
2. David makes Michal uncomfortable...she is the daughter of the old King, the one who tried to kill David...she's embarrassed by him.
3. David makes the old guard nervous...some say that's why he's bringing the ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem after 20 years as king...it will help legitimize him in the eyes of those who still see him as the youngest son of a sheep farmer...
4. Michal doesn't like him dancing wildly in a Speedo in front of everybody else...including the leaders in Jerusalem.
5. And if we're honest, I'm betting that many of us are made a little uncomfortable by the sight as well...David...the anointed one is parading around in his underwear...making a spectacle of himself...on behalf of God...
6. After all...real men don't dance...well...right...oh...it's okay to do the white man's overbite dancing in high school...and the weight shifting dancing with your significant other...but there is something about this kind of ecstatic, un-choreographed, physical display of joy that is just too...I don't know...intimate for public display.
7. What is it about dancing? As Beth Jones, a pastor in Kalamazoo, Michigan puts it...  
To dance is to reach for a word that doesn't exist,  
To sing the heart song of a thousand generations,  
To feel the meaning of a moment in time.

Dancing is not the most common activity in scripture. Sure there are a number of references to groups of people who dance in celebrations and to offer praise in joyful settings, but the only specifically named individuals who are described as dancing in scripture are Moses' sister Miriam who danced after the Israelites escaped slavery in Egypt, King David here and Herodias, the one tradition calls Salome, the daughter of King Herod who used her dance to seek the death of John the Baptist.

That's the other thing about dancing...it's, well, dangerous. In the tradition I grew up in, dancing was something that was too private, too intimate, for anyone but married people...

8. So when David chooses to dance in public, he's living into the legacy of thanksgiving for deliverance...but also playing with fire...doing something the Bible typically associates with women...which sounds fine for us, but in David's era, was beyond risky.
9. And David seems beyond caring...sure he's moving the Ark into Jerusalem for a reason, but it gives him a chance to celebrate how God has, in his eyes, delivered Israel from her enemies...how Yahweh has preserved David himself

when Saul sought his death...He doesn't care if this is not how a king is supposed to act...David is praising the God who has taken him from being the kid who was so unimportant when they were looking for a new king in his family, he was still out in the field tending the sheep...It was this God who protected him against Goliath...And when he fled Saul's jealous and murderous rage and hid in the cave of Adullam, it was this God whose presence he felt, protecting him and preparing him...David has much to be grateful for and he's not afraid to be thought a fool...Indeed, he seems to know he will be.

Well, that's interesting I suppose...but so what?  
What does David's half-naked liturgical dance have to do with us? It's not like we have to worry about not caring what people think about us...right?

I don't know about you, but there have been times in recent years when it's been more than a little embarrassing to be considered a Christian...

After all...

It was Christians who murdered abortion doctors...

It is Christians who parade around in hoods spreading racial, ethnic and religious hatred and intolerance even to this day...

It was Christians who used anti-Islamic rhetoric unnecessary laws to ban states from following Sharia law...

It is Christians who protest military funerals with their hateful signs...

It was a Christian who killed those nine people praying and studying at Mother Emanuel AME church...

It is Christians who have been urging that they are exempt from laws requiring government officials to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

It makes me wonder...with so many unpleasant and dangerous associations in many folks minds about Christianity...in our culture, are we moving towards a day when being open about being followers of Jesus Christ is the new equivalent to David's dancing....

People will look at us and think we are THOSE kinds of people. If we are open about being Jesus' followers, won't we be tagged with those adjectives that we heard so much about in that poll of young people back in 2007...when the words most likely to be used to describe Christianity were: judgmental, hypocritical and anti-gay.

There is even a national organization called "Not All Like That"...a number of inclusive religious groups, including the Chicago Coalition of Welcoming Churches, helped form this group for folks to identify themselves as Christians who are Not like those Christians.

But here's the thing...if we are afraid to be open about who we are, when we do the good works we feel called and compelled to do but are uncomfortable in the midst of them saying that we are living out our faith...we perpetuate the problem...we continue

to allow the public face of Christianity to be something very different than we perceive ourselves to be.

But more importantly, I think we hurt ourselves...and impede the growth of our own faith...When we allow the Queen Michal voices in the culture or inside our heads make us embarrassed or silent or un-dancing...we create divides between the life of faith and other parts of life...We create barriers between our public selves and our beloved child of God selves...and we choke off our own joy...

David knew something in the midst of his ecstatic dance for God...that by throwing himself full bore into his dance, he was placing his entire self in service to the God who made him, loved him and journey with him.

He was allowing himself to fully experience the irrational, wonderful love of God surging through his veins. Some of us have felt a bit of that, when we lose ourselves in singing or hearing a beautiful anthem, or when we let our children teach us and we abandon ourselves fully in play with them, and some of us even experience it as David did, when we dance.

When we let go of what we are afraid other people will think about us if we are too Christian...we open ourselves to the playful, joyful experience of being loved unconditionally...of being created for joy and expression and community...

Pearl Armoza knows what that is like...thanks to her Mom.

Pearl loves watching dancers, she has all of her very short life so far. Pearl and her mother Natalia live in New York City. Natalia has observed how much her daughter is drawn to dance and she's been searching for a long time for some way for her to express it. She can't just take Pearl to a dance studio for a regular preschool class though. Because Pearl has cerebral palsy, which in her case limits Pearls movements and her ability to communicate like a typical seven-year-old.

Natalia wrote to the New York City Ballet to ask about a program for children like Pearl and that letter has changed so many lives. As depicted in a now viral video on the internet, two of the principal dancers of the New York City Ballet teamed up with Dr. Joseph Dutkowsky at the Feinberg Cerebral Palsy Center at Columbia University Medical Center and designed a dance class just for Pearl and children like her. Two months ago this week, they held their first class...and on the very first day...they had a decision to make...would the children wear the braces and other devices that held their limbs in the proper position or assisted them in balance or not.

Doctor Joe as they call him said...this is dance, not physical therapy, and all of the restraints and constrictions were removed. And the children and their mentors let themselves go...and whether standing or sitting in wheelchairs or even held by their loving parents...they danced...Pearl and 18 other little ones, many for the first time...It wasn't the careful and dazzling precision of Balanchine or Martha Graham...but their

own beautiful, free celebration of the music and of just being...they moved freely and unrestrained...letting the music and the instruction of the dancers carry them to a place they had never been before..

And that, I believe is what the Spirit wants for each of us...to find that place where we can surrender our entire lives—our lives at work, our lives at home, our lives in every arena—to the music of God’s gracing love, let the teachings of the past and the teachers of the present give us the tools, but then taking them and surrendering to the music of life...of hope...of peace... Not so concerned with the “shoulda-woulda-coulda”...and much more interested in finding the joy that comes from forgiving, from loving, from sharing our lives with others...

Unconcerned that we will be seen as one of “those people”...confident that if we let ourselves dance to God’s melodies of grace and hope and justice and love and not those of our own making that rather than inspiring Queen Michal’s derision...more will be inspired to join the dance...

Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said...I would believe only in a God that knows how to dance.

With all due respect...I would change that a little...I believe in a God who is constantly, joyfully, freely inviting us into the dance...  
Thanks be to God.