

## "Lord of the Dance"

II Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:14-29  
July 15, 2018 -- 15th Sunday O.

### 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. {2} David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. {3} They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart {4} with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. {5} David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; {13} and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. {14} David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. {15} So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. {16} As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart. {17} They brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the LORD. {18} When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts, {19} and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

## **EPHESIANS 1:3-14 (The Message)**

**3-6** How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is! He's the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.

**7-10** Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. *Abundantly* free! He thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans he took such delight in making. He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.

**11-12** It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for.

**13-14** It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This signet from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.

## Mark 6:14-29

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." {15} But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." {16} But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." {17} For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. {18} For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." {19} And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, {20} for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. {21} But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. {22} When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." {23} And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." {24} She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." {25} Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." {26} The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. {27} Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, {28} brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. {29} When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

There are a lot of metaphors for life. Today we are given by our scriptures Dance as a metaphor for life. It starts with moonlit midnight as a young mom or day or maybe both gently sway back and forth to settle a restless baby so they can rest. Then there are those tentative dance steps like a teetering tottering toddler and then you sit through a three hour dance recital waiting for your little girl's 3 minutes as she twirls to her hearts contend on stage. Then you'll see something like the drama of an 11<sup>th</sup> grade boy who shifts feet from side to side and sways awkwardly to the music until about 5 minutes before the prom is over to seize the moment and ask that pretty brown eyed girl who sits in the front row in homeroom if she wants to dance. Which leads, of course to what they call the first dance, that isn't first at all, when the bride and groom dance with each other and then their Dad and/or mom. Then there's the dance you do to do your best to make your spouse happy and manage a two step or two. Sometimes, transitionally, you find yourself in the emotional wringer of finding a new partner to dance with when the old one decides she's all ballroom and you in your mid-lifeness decide you are all boogie woogie. Finally, you dance, in a kind of return to your teetering tottering days, mostly slow dances with the one you love and then a series of folks who do their best to hold you up.

You see, whether people are moving to music or not, whether it is mind blowingly fast and furious like that tap dancer or numbingly slow, it is all, not just the dancing, it is all...a dance called life. Because life itself, and all that goes into it, is a dance. We may not dance a jig, or do the waltz, tango, fox trot, or twist. We might not ever dance with old Cotton Eyed Joe or do an Electric glide..We may never step into a mosh pit or do any head banging, and not many of us could ever do what they used to call break dancing, but if you are living and breathing you are part of a cosmic, eternal, continual, perpetual, dance of life. Although, most of us will only dance in the dark to the really slow music.

Dancing is really humanity's first and oldest art form. It is even older than

art, according to some authorities, and provided the basis of all the arts. Dancing is our first art-form because it is a primal impulse, born of rhythm. Believe it or not the human body, even Presbyterians, has a natural appetite for rhythm; even a baby a few months old will move its tiny body to rhythmic sound or music. Our very pulse keeps a kind of cosmic time that speeds up and slows down as we dance the dance of life.

The bible certainly recognizes the dance as one of life's metaphors. God supplies the musical theme and we do our best to hang on. Today we experience the youthful, exuberant dance of triumph. A no holds barred reveling dance of pure joy with David, stripped down to the bare essentials, as he and his dance troupe dance with all their might around that old juke box that sets the tone called the ark of the covenant. Then there's that other dance with a kid named Salome, stripped down to her bare essentials, dancing to the latest tunes of whatever minstrels old Herod hired for his birthday party. She ends up shimmying the old fool into a corner and in a swirl of veils and smiles and the promise of tripping the light fantastic which, tragically as we know when old fools rule the day, ends with the head of a great prophet on a platter.

King David's dance is taken as an act of holy expression to God, an ultimate out-pouring of worship and praise to his God that ends with old Saul's daughter, Michal, angry at such a frenzied expression and David who had usurped the throne from her dear old dad, Saul. (Michal was probably Presbyterian.)

Salome's dance doesn't end so well for anyone but Herodias who hated John. In Mark, it slows Jesus momentum as he is making his way to the cross and his date with the dance of death. Some sombering dirgeful foreshadowing dancing takes over for awhile.

It's sad, but from here on in scripture there is only one other reference to dancing and that is when the older brother came home and discovered his younger brothers party and his friends dancing like there was no tomorrow in the

story of the prodigal son -- and he let's us know what he thought of the dancing. He may have been a Baptist. We know he had no intention of dancing, in celebration or otherwise.

The truth is that we have been and are still involved in a kind of dance -- a cosmic and eternal and mysterious kind of dance that has, from the beginning of time, been initiated with us by the God who has created us. It **is** the dance called life. And like a grand ballet or a Broadway musical, the dance of life has all sorts of ups and downs and tempos and movements and expressions. Some of us are very good at it and others do all their dancing right here...(Tap the head) and the message never gets to the feet.

If you listen closely to the music though, if you are attentive to the melody in a place like this letter to the Ephesians that plays like a great ballad you get the feeling that what God wants for us is to tap our toes and clap our hands in joy to rhythm of what God's done for us in Jesus. Paul, that old rascal, who knew he had it in him, says that God had this planned all along and that in Jesus God has given us everything, everything that we need to be free to "skip to my lou" through life with happiness.... Free to express joy, not just joy, Abundant Joy!! In the Message, a great translation, we hear that "long before we first ever heard of Jesus and got our hopes up for a date to the prom, that he already had his eye on us, like that 11<sup>h</sup> grade boy with his eye on that brown eyed girl. Paul is just whistling up a storm and tells us that Jesus already had "designs" on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone. In other words Jesus had every intention of making us, the church, his bride and asking us to – dance.

We are the church and we have been invited to participate in a dance called life with the Lord of the Dance named Jesus. We can either sit idly by, wishing we were a part of what is happening, or we can get out there, on the dance floor, in the world and join in and take part in the life Christ offers.

The dance of Jesus is a dance of love and fellowship and service. It's a dance of helping one another and putting aside our worries so that those who need a partner in the dance in order to survive, in order to thrive, in order to simply live....might have that chance. You don't have to have any rhythm, you just have the heart, the mind of Christ, to do the dance.

Ann Weems, a saint now from her labor's resting and a Presbyterian elder and poet, says that the greatest irony of the Christian life is the difference between what we say we believe and will do....and what actually believe and will do. She says,

**We say we believe in Jesus Christ - the way, the Truth, the Life. But there's something discordant in the words and the living:**

**We say dance, but we crawl.**

**We say peace, but we gather arms.**

**We say Life, but we kill.**

**We say joy, but we repress.**

**We say hope, but we give up.**

**We say community, but we divide.**

**We say celebrate, but we yawn.**

**We say give, but we take.**

**We say good news, but we mean ho-hum.**

**We say we are our brother's and our sister's keeper,  
but we don't do anything about it.**

**We moralize about people who are hungry.**

**We shake our fingers at kids who use drugs.**

**We gossip about those who threaten us.**

**We ridicule those who are different.**

**We ignore the needs of the elderly.**

**We turn our backs to the lonely.**

**We condone morals that violate personhood:**

**a little lying, a little cheating, a little obscenity won't hurt.**

**We say where your heart is there is your treasure also,**

**but our treasure is things.**

**We say we believe in Jesus Christ**

**-- he wants to lead us in the dance of life**

**-- do we want to follow (and give up the lead?)**

**Can we not remember -- what he has done for us?**

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black,

It's hard to dance with the devil on your back.

They buried my body and they thought I'd gone ...

But! I am the dance and I still go on.

Dance, then, wherever you may be;

I am the Lord of the Dance, said He,

And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,

And I'll lead you all in the dance, said He.

Let us join together in the dance of life. Let us gather hearts, minds, souls, and all our strength to join the dance that is called the church, and together in all we do, celebrate the life giving dance Jesus offers us. Jesus invites the church to join him on the dance floor of life, of plenty and need, of hurt and joy, of sorrow and triumph, of life....because HE is the dance, and he still goes on.

His hand is out and he's inviting us – here's some music –

Let's dance with him and say "We are your people – Lord by your Grace... Amen!