

Shall We Dance?

A prompting offered by Ruth Hopkins, Seminary Intern
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Cross Creek Community Church, United Church of Christ
Dayton, Ohio

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-23

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. 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. 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 with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. 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; and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

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.

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. 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, 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. David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, 'How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!' David said to Michal, 'It was before the Lord, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord, that I have danced before the Lord. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in my own eyes; but by the maids of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor.' And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might...

2 Samuel 6:5

As we read in today's verses, King David brings the Ark of the Covenant to his new capital, Jerusalem. Let's refresh our memory a bit about what was going on. David, even before Saul's death, had been building a power base in the south, which was called Judah. After Saul's death, he was crowned the king of Judah. David had a wife, Michal, and as she was Saul's daughter, she gave him additional credibility for his claim to the throne. In the north, Saul's son ruled, and David's minions may have murdered him. This cleared the way for his crowning as king over the northern tribes as well. This began the United Monarchy, the golden age of the Hebrew Scriptures. David captured Jerusalem and sought to unify his kingdom by bringing the Ark of the Covenant to its new home. In today's reading we get the account of this grand procession into Jerusalem with the ark. Since there was no temple yet, they put the ark under a tent, and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well being to God. He then provided his people with a grand feast and blessed them.

This little story has some big consequences. By bringing the ark to Jerusalem, David is uniting

the north and south, as well as making Jerusalem the city of not only David, but of God. We still feel the repercussions of this act, even now, as Jerusalem remains a divided city, with Judaism, Islam, and Christianity claiming it as their own. And the question of "Where does God live?" is alive and well today. Does God live in a temple, or does God move around with us? Do we have a king, or are we in exile?

But for now, let's celebrate with David. For this is his last hurrah – his last big triumph before things go bad. David danced with all his might, for joy, in only a loincloth. Oh David! Can you imagine? I guess it would be like Obama, dancing in a Speedo, bringing the constitution back to the National Archives. Well, maybe not, but it would be a sight.

The people of Israel were happy, they were joyous, and what do you do when you are happy? You dance. What do you do when you are happy? Laugh? Smile? Do you dance? Do you dance with all your might?

I can remember the first time I attended chapel at United Seminary. There was a rock band in the corner, and with a crash of cymbals, the praise music began. People were clapping, swaying, and raising their hands in the air to the music. I felt really out of it. I stood there, feeling very uncomfortable, and slightly embarrassed for all of them.

I had simply never experienced it before. Even though I am a cradle UCCer, we were more of the Evangelical reformed branch, those stoic Germans, standing erect and singing *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. The clapping and swaying were for Youth Sundays.

So I can relate a bit to David's wife. She was embarrassed for him. For he was dancing half naked, jumping around and, to her, acting like a hyena. "A fine spectacle you've made of yourself!" she says. It's clear she, as queen, feels like his behavior reflects on her, which at that time it did. As for David, his relationship with God and the joy he felt was far more important than what others thought. He was willing to look foolish, to him; only the ones who didn't understand would see it as foolishness.

It takes courage to behave foolishly. In this culture it takes courage to ever feel any emotion, joy or sadness. We don't jump for joy when we are happy, we don't cry in public. We are expected to behave, and now that cell phones have cameras, well, you never know when you will be tagged on Facebook. We aren't to talk about politics or anything controversial at gatherings. And we medicate ourselves and our natural feelings into a numbness to match what seem to be our surroundings.

We rarely dance. In fact, when we do move our bodies, it is usually by appointment, in a gym. And yet dancing is one of the most ancient of arts. When, why, did we stop? Instead of dancing, we now watch other people dance on "Dancing with the Stars" and evaluate their performances. We watch, we are wallflowers.

Now I know that it is often hard to find joy in this life, let alone dance to it. But I like to think of us all as dancers, whatever our physical ability, with life itself as the dance. We are all on the dance floor, some dancing, some sitting on the sidelines, in our groups, like high school, while the music plays on. The music is not always joyful; sometimes it is slow and sad.

My sister-in-law, Mary Beth, or Sis, to us, died several years ago. She had married into a large, Irish, Catholic family, the Fitzpatrick's. After the funeral, we all went to the Parish Hall, where they were serving Sis's fabulous BBQ Brisket. Suddenly I heard Irish clogging music, and was stunned to see Sis's husband, Kevin and his sisters get up and start clogging. Tears were streaming down his face, his sister's faces as well, yet they kept on clogging. "We do it at weddings and funerals," someone said, "and just about every time we are together. It's our tradition." They just do it, they just dance. There was comfort in the dancing, a comfort that words could not describe. Courage is dancing in the face of death.

Our community prayer has some lovely images of this dance of life. I would like to read the verses of the prayer now; we will pray it again later. It is by Jan Berry, from the book Bread of

Tomorrow.

God, you invite us to dance in delight,
shaping and forming in figures of grace.
We move to the pulse of creation's music
and rejoice to be part of the making of earth.

In the steps of Jesus we reach to our partners,
touching and holding and finding our strengths.
Together we move into patterns of freedom,
and rejoice to be part of the sharing of hope.

We whirl and spin in the Spirit's rhythm,
embracing the world with our circles of joy.
Together we dance for salvation and justice,
and rejoice to be part of the moving of love.

God, by giving us life, extends the invitation to the dance. The Spirit provides the music and pulse. And Jesus is our partner, the caller of the steps, showing us how to dance. Jesus partners us, and spins us out into the world to teach the dance to others, then spins us back to him again for rest. When we dance in the steps of Jesus, we can make the world more just, more free, more loving. When we dance, when we live, with all our might, I believe we honor God our creator. When we live as if it counts, we are dancing the dance of life with all our might.

How does this dancing through life play out in everyday life? As writer Robert Darden, Senior Editor of *The Wittenberg Door* suggests, live large. Be interesting and interested in other people. Listen with attention to others talk about their lives. Be engaged, tell stories, stay upbeat. Be alive. For to us, as Christians, *all* of life is a dance party.

Mike Yaconelli, co-founder of the youth ministry called Youth Specialties, explains,
The more pagan a society becomes, the more boring its people become. The sign that Jesus is in our hearts, the evidence of the truth of the Gospel is.. we still have a light on in our souls. We still have a gleam in our eye. We are alive, never boring, always playful, exhibiting in our everydayness the "spunk" of the Spirit. The light in our souls is not some pietistic, somberness; it is the spontaneous, unpredictable love of life. Christians are not just people who live godly lives; we are people who know how to live period. Christians are not just examples of moral purity, we are also people filled with a bold mischievousness, Christians, not only know how to practice piety, we also know how to party. I believe it's time for the party to begin.

When I was at church camp one of our favorite songs was "The Lord of the Dance." (not the River dance version) Sung to the tune of "Simple Gifts," we sang it so much we were all tired of it. Many of you probably know it. The chorus says, "Dance, then, where ever you may be, I am the Lord of the Dance, said he. And I'll lead you all, where ever you may be, and I'll lead you all in the dance, said he."

Will you let him lead you in the dance? Will you say yes, and dance with all your might, risk looking foolish, lost in holy joy? The music is playing, shall we dance?