

2/5/12 Wilton

DANCING BEFORE THE LORD

*II Samuel 6:12-17; 20-21; Luke 15:25-32*

*I sent a mediation with the same title a year ago to the committee that was considering me as the interim pastor here. So, I never expected to preach part of it here, if I came. But then Al picked the Lord of the Dance as the anthem for this Sunday, so I felt I had to share my thoughts about dancing before the Lord. What influence that man has on me.*

*Instead of reading the second scripture I'll just tell you the story. Then make a few comments before we share communion. Tradition insists that David was the greatest king the nation of Israel ever had. For starters, he was an incredibly shrewd politician. (This primary season seems to be a time to talk about shrewd and not so shrewd politicians.) David was one of the best. For instance, after he became the king he captured a non-Jewish town called Jerusalem. To cement the different Hebrew tribes together he made this neutral town his new capital. Then he ordered brought to Jerusalem the ark of the covenant, the holy box said to have been created by Moses two hundred years before. Symbol of the presence and the power of God. Brought it to Jerusalem to make that city both the political and the religious center binding the tribes together.*

*But David was more than a shrewd politician. There was another side to him. He was a man of passionate faith. So as the ark was carried into Jerusalem David was suddenly overcome with emotion. He threw off his outer garments and in a loin cloth, in a loin cloth, he danced before the ark, before the throne of God. Whirling and leaping. Soon the people along the way joined in his dance. A massive emotional outburst.*

*Now David's number one wife was Michal. She was the daughter of the former king, Saul. Raised in the royal court. She believed in God, but what she really believed in was royal propriety, doing things decently and in order - that's what she really believed in. She looked out the window of the royal dwelling and saw her husband, king of the realm, half naked, leaping and dancing as the ark was carried into the city. She was appalled.*

*When David came home, sweaty, tired, but filled with the joy of the occasion, she was standing at the front door waiting. Hands on hips. Mouth set. "Well, what a glorious day for the king of Israel, stripping half naked in front of all those commoners, dancing like any vulgar buffoon."*

*"I was dancing for God, God, who choose me to follow your father, appointed me as prince over Israel. I was dancing and making merry before God. There are things, my dear, you can't say with words, feelings you can't express with logic. I had to dance for God."*

*"No, as a self-respecting leader you had to be rational and restrained."*

*Needless to say, there was not a great deal of harmony in the royal household that evening. The scripture story ends with the sentence: "and Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no child to the day of her death". You can draw your own conclusions.*

*Now in each of us there are both of those people. There is the Michal side and the David side - left and right brain if you're into that sort of stuff. There is the side of us that is rational, disciplined, restrained, - the Michal Meeawl) side that does things decently and in order. Left brain. That's a necessary and good side of us. Then there is the side that is David like - in this story - emotional, spontaneous, unrestrained, capable of ecstasy. Right brain. And that's a good side of us too. Both sides are good. We have both sides in us.*

*You see the same qualities portrayed in Jesus' story of the two sons that Beth read this morning. When studying that passage, I ask groups to list the positive attributes of each brother. Not in moral terms, just basic personality terms. No morality. Hard, but block the moral judgements. When folks are describing the younger son who took his inheritance and went into the far country in positive terms they use words like: adventuresome, risk taker, creative, spontaneous, fun loving. That's right brain stuff. Like David in our story. For the older brother, who stayed home and managed the farm, the list is loyal, dependable, rational, structured, steady, solid. Left brain. Like Michal. ) We all have both of those brothers in us, both sides. But in each of us one side usually dominates. The steady, solid, rational side, or the risk taking, emotional , spontaneous side. Which side do you think dominates in you? Which side do others think is dominate in you? Check it out some time.*

*One of the challenges for each of us is to develop the other side - the less dominant side. To let it out on occasion. I remember once after a study listed the positives of the two sons, one young woman said, "I'm like the older brother, solid, loyal, dependable. The one that everybody counts on. But I have that other side in me - the younger brother adventuresome side - and I need to listen to it more often." Which side dominates in you? Which side do you need to listen to more often?*

*Now Presbyterians, we tend to emphasize the Michal side - the older brother side - the logical, rational side. We actually pride ourselves on doing things "decently and in order". That's a phrase we often use. You know it has been said that in small towns a hundred years ago the Baptist church was always located next to the water tower for obvious reasons. The Methodist church beside the fire station that their enthusiasm might from time to time be hosed down, and the Presbyterian church beside the ice house to help with the refrigeration. Presbyterians - Cool. Decent. Orderly. Restrained in our worship. Indeed we pride ourselves often as not being like those Pentecostal shouters. That's us traditionally and it's not bad. A bit uptight. But not wrong or bad. There is that other side though, even in Presbyterians, the David side of each of us that needs expression in our worship, in our lives. Ecstasy. Spontaneity. Which brings me to*

*the communion service.*

*Frankly for a long time I had trouble with communion. I suppose because I am kind of a Presbyterian type, Michal type. Older brother type. Rational. And if you analyze communion it's just dumb. Taking a pinch of bread and sip of grape juice or wine. Why would any sane person waste time doing that? Oh, I knew the theological explanations. I'd been to seminary. Could spout them. But frankly, rationally, communion seemed empty. And I could never really get with it. Then I came upon a quote from Thomas Merton. Merton - Trappist monk, spiritual leader, was asked to explain the meaning of the priest's motions during the Catholic mass. Folks expected a deep theological analysis. Instead Merton said: "Well, all those motions of the priest at the altar, it's like a dance, a dance with God. And if you get with it, you get to dance with God too." And suddenly I got it. You see - the Michal side of me - the no nonsense rational Presbyterian side says - this eating a crumb of bread - is dumb - but Merton helped the David side of me, the emotional, fun loving, spontaneous side of me suddenly make sense of it -you get to dance with God. To make merry with our Lord Jesus. That's what communion is. Not meant to be rational. You get to dance with God.*

*Three quick thoughts about that:*

*1) There are some folks at every worship who don't feel like dancing with God. It is not just that they are lopsided like I am sometimes - with the cool Michal Meecawl) side too dominant. No. It's that you have come into this place with heavy burdens. Fears. For yourselves or others. Or problems too heavy to carry. Or just depressed. You don't feel like dancing. But this may be the place and the time to let it go for a while - whatever your burdens are. Or rather to let God carry it for you. To dance with God may mean for you the word: "Cast your burden on the Lord." To you, God may be saying, "For a while, let go of your problems, fears, come dance with me. Come dance with God."*

*2) Second thought. Notice both Michal, David's wife, and the elder brother concentrate on their resentments. Michal is sure that David misbehaved, embarrassed her. The elder brother feels that his father has not valued his faithful years of service. You never gave me a party. Both spend a lot of time focusing on their resentments. It interests me that left brained, rational type people - like me -very often tend to do that, tend to spend a lot of time brooding about their resentments, hugging our hurts. I tend to do that too much. Maybe some of you do too. Notice: Michal seems to say: I'd rather be appalled at David than enjoy the celebration. The elder brother says: "I'm not going to come to party, I'm going to stand out here and pout." Oh, how some of us can spot ourselves in those two. And the father in Jesus story says, "Come to the party. Let it go, don't miss out on the dance." We who tend to hug our hurts, need to hear that glad invitation: Let it go, and join the dance.*

*3) Third thought: the elders probably will not dance down the aisles with the communion trays. The Michal Presbyterian part of us is far too strong for that. But the*

*wine and the bread symbolize the holy presence of God's mercy and caring. And the elders bring it to you because God comes to meet you wherever you are. You don't have to come forward. You don't have to climb any mountain of good deeds. You don't have to believe in any set creed. God comes dancing down this aisle to meet you just where you are and to embrace you with compassion and affection. No, the elders probably will not dance. It would be all right if they wished to, but I don't think they will. But maybe if you watch with the David imagination side of you - as the light glistens off the trays, and the bread is passed, the wine shared - maybe - if you watch with your imagination, maybe you'll see God dancing into your life.*

*Hymn immediately 302 (verses 1 and 2)*