

Dance Lessons

Rev. Nancy Willet
2 Sam. 6:1-5; 12-19
Mark 6:14-29

FPC Uvalde
July 12, 2009
Uvalde, TX

Ok—I have to confess. I am a Dancing With the Stars fan! I love watching that show! There is just something about the expression through the movement of the couples dancing that completely entralls me. The dances each have a different feel and different emotion behind them, and the dancers become, throughout the season, quite adept in showing those emotions through the dance.

One of the things I like about DWTS, is that the producers usually choose stars that don't have a lot of previous dance experience. They choose football stars and comedians, models and actors.

Both of our scripture readings for today involve some dancing. They are both important stories in our Bible, that have a lot to say about us today and about how our bodies can be used in worship—as in David's case, or can be used to persuade, as in the case of Herodias' daughter dancing for her step-father.

Let's look first at David. This is the story of David dancing in the streets with the 30,000 men he had mustered. David and his men were bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The Ark was a gilded box,

made of acacia wood, with a winged cherubim sitting on top. This served as a place for the invisibly enthroned Yahweh to reside. Where the Ark was, so was God. The Ark was before the building of the temple, so if you were in the presence of the Ark, you were in the presence of God.

The Ark moved around a lot according to who had won a victory over whom. In this text, Israel is getting the Ark back after two victories over the Philistines.

The movement of the Ark to Jerusalem—the City of David—was a really big deal. With the Ark in Jerusalem, the Kingship of God is now linked to David’s rule of Israel. God’s protection now of Israel came through the protection of God’s anointed King.

This was an extremely happy time for the Israelites and for David. The text says “David and the whole house of Israel were dancing before the Lord (meaning the Ark) with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals” (2 Sam. 6:5). Later, in verse 14, it says that David danced before the Lord with all his might. They were celebrating! They were enthusiastic about their worship. The word, *enthusiastic* originally meant, “in God” (*en theos*). They were worshipping God with all their heart, their minds, their souls, and **their bodies!**

As the Ark came into the city, David's wife—Michal (who was not real pleased with her marriage or with David at that time) looked out her window and saw her husband leaping and dancing in the street. The text says “she despised him in her heart.” Well, I'm sure there were a lot of reasons she despised him other than his dancing, but I would guess her husband's dancing maybe made her uncomfortable, uneasy. Can any of you relate to that when you've experienced dancing and worship linked together?

And while we are talking about being uncomfortable, let's look at the story in Mark about Herodias' daughter dancing for her stepfather. This is a disturbing story. It is a drama packed with old grudges, political intrigue, sexual innuendos and a beheading. And who said reading the Bible was boring?!

I will attempt to explain a little of the family tree here, and we will understand better the outcome of this whole story—the beheading of John the Baptist.

Herodias was the daughter of Herod's (her husband's) half-brother, and therefore, she was her husband's niece. She was also the former wife of Herod's (her current husband) half-brother, which made her the sister-in-law of her husband. This is a very tangled up matrimonial story, and one that you may or may not have followed here, but leave it to say, this

matrimonial mess was the mess that John the Baptist publicly spoke up against.

He had rebuked Herod for marrying Herodias, his niece and sister in law. While *Herod* still feared and respected John and knew he was someone of God—even after the rebuking, Herodias was furious with John for embarrassing her and her new husband.

Herodias got her chance to get back at John at a party Herod was giving for all the other royalty. Herodias encouraged her own daughter to dance for Herod and the other men. Talk about Dancing With the Stars! However, I would not call this young woman's dance ballroom dancing!

Let me explain about this dance. A solo dance at a gathering such as this was not a dance performed in worship of God, as David's dance was. Women who danced such dances were usually prostitutes and the men watching the dancer pretty much had one thing on their mind.

Well, ole Herod was so taken by this young girl's dance that he said she could have anything she wanted. She asked her mother, Herodias, what to ask for. This was just the break Herodias was looking for—to make John the Baptist pay for embarrassing her.

Herod was grieved by the request, but not so grieved that he was able to put the life of John the Baptist in front of his own loss of dignity if he

did not uphold his promise, his oath to the young woman, and John the Baptist was beheaded.

So where does this leave us today with the issue of dancing? We have heard two very different stories with dancing involved—one in which David used his energy and his body to glorify and worship God, the other in which a young girl used her body to dance to bring about the death of one of God's own. A dance of death you might call it.

I think we may miss the point here, if we think we are simply talking about dancing. As I said last week, God did not make us like puppets, acting whenever God pulls our strings. We have been given the freedom to use our bodies, through dance, or any other type of expression we feel is appropriate to glorify God.

What we are called to do is to glorify GOD in all things, and for some, dancing can be a marvelous outlet to express this.

Let's go back to being uncomfortable in our worship services today, when we are around folks waving their hands, bopping their heads to the beat of a song, or out and out dancing in the aisles?

What is it, do you think, that makes us feel uneasy? Do we maybe feel like we are not being sacred or holy enough? David sure didn't think that. "In the Aramaic language which Jesus spoke, the word for 'rejoice'

and ‘dance’ is the same” (Homiletics, Vol. 21, No. 4 pg. 19). We don’t seem to have any trouble rejoicing in the Lord.

Are we afraid we will embarrass ourselves by not knowing the “right” way to wave our hands or stomp our feet? Maybe. But who cares? Are you bopping your head for your neighbor, or for God?

Now don’t get too anxious here today, folks. I’m not going to dance down the aisle after the benediction—I would be embarrassed, and I’ll bet you would be embarrassed for me.

I just want you to hear, that it is ok, it is good, and it is right, when we are so moved to use something other than our mouths and our minds in worship. When we are enthusiastic—when we are *en Theos*—In God—we are worshipping with everything God gave us.

I would like to close us today with just a little movement and I would like the children’s help with this, if I may.

I would like us to say the part of the Lord’s Prayer I taught the children this morning in their time while using the hand gestures.

If you are able, please stand.

Start with arms and hands in front, with palms raised.

Our Father *(look up and raise hands above head)*

Who art in heaven *(lower arms and place hands over mouth)*

Hallowed be thy name	<i>(spread arms out wide)</i>
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done	<i>(point to the ground)</i>
On earth	<i>(sweep arms upward)</i>
As it is in heaven.	

You may be seated. And let us pray.

We give you thanks, dear Lord, that you have created us with many different ways to worship and rejoice in you. Bless our bodies this week as we are aware that through movement we can glorify you and love you.

Amen.