

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

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.

It was told King David, "The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." 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.*

Dancing for Joy - July 11, 2021

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People like to dance, don't we? So many songs are written about dancing. Dancing is part of our celebrations. Almost every occasion, almost every event in human life can have dancing associated with it.

We go to dancing clubs to be with friends — to be with strangers — to allow ourselves to be caught up in the music and just allow ourselves to be transported elsewhere. Sometimes, of course, people get themselves transported too far, losing control for any number of reasons. Whether at clubs or weddings — especially those with lots of alcohol — dancing and drinking and interacting creates an experience which is powerful. It can be powerfully good. It can be powerfully bad.

Dancing takes so many forms, doesn't it? I certainly have very little formal training in how to dance. If I do get up, I just kind of move around. And at my age I try not to move in ways I will regret the next day!

Yet we also put a lot of value in how well we can dance and how well we can follow pre-planned movements. There is a TV program, "Dancing with the Stars" that celebrates the grace and beauty of ballroom dancing. Contestants are judged on how well they can follow the well-defined stepping of the Foxtrot, the Two-Step, and the Cha-Cha-Cha.

Dancing is also a coming of age event for many of us. We remember high-school dances and proms where we were actually encouraged to dance with others and — gasp — actually touch each other in public. And of course such dances were and continue to be a source of frustration for those who wanted to be with and touch people that society says they couldn't. I did see a report of a high school that proudly crowned two prom queens as a couple. Maybe things are changing a bit.

And touching and closeness are both part of the joys of dancing and the dangers. No question, dancing can be dangerous. Remember the Lynyrd Skynyrd song, "Gimme Three Steps?"

I was cutting the rug Down at place called The Jug With a girl named Linda Lou When in walked a man With a gun in his hand And he was looking for you know who.

Yeah some guy was dancing with another's girlfriend and he was in trouble big. You may remember the movie Footloose, which takes place in a small town which has banned dancing. It seems there was a party and some kids were dancing and drinking and sadly were killed in an auto accident. The town, and of course the church, got together and banned dancing as their solution. In the movie, Kevin Bacon plays a new kid in town who tries and eventually succeeds in getting the ban

lifted. Nonetheless, Footloose, which has a lot of great songs in it, does remind us that dancing can be a very emotional experience which can cause us to lose control of ourselves and not make the best decisions. At the very least, we can conclude that when people dance, strange things can happen.

Certainly strange things were happening when the newly-anointed King David brought the Ark of the Covenant to his new capital city of Jerusalem. We talked last week about David, who probably has more stories about him than anyone else in the Bible, with the exception of Jesus. Moreover, quite a number of Psalms are said to have been written by David. You may recall that David was a very complex person. We meet him when he was just eight years old, the youngest in his family. The priest Samuel was ordered by God to anoint him king to succeed Saul, a man who disappointed God terribly. David was apparently a skilled musician because he landed a job in the court of Saul as a harp player. It seemed his playing had the power to calm Saul, who was subject to fits of rage. This same David was the one who, armed only with a slingshot, defeated Goliath, the champion of the Philistines.

If you participate in our online Daily Prayer services, you'll know that for the past few weeks we've been following the story of David, Saul, and Saul's son, Jonathan. These are fascinating stories and they wouldn't be out of place at all on the pages of today's newspapers. There was plenty of adventure and intrigue as Saul went back and forth from being David's friend to being utterly terrified that David was plotting to take his kingdom. There are stories that record that when David was playing his harp for Saul, Saul would suddenly become violent, grab a spear, and throw it at David! Needless to say, David was in constant fear for his own life. Curiously, David's best friend and biggest supporter in all the drama was Jonathan, Saul's own son!

With God's help, David survived the wrath of Saul. Over time, he proved himself to be a skilled commander and led his people to numerous victories over the surrounding nations. Recall that Israel was a small country, surrounded by enemies. Only a leader like David, supported by his God, could lead his people and keep the nation safe.

As we discussed last week, David finally was accepted as king by all of Israel. Saul, along with Jonathan, had been killed in battle. The time had come for David to start his reign. What better way to do so than to move the Ark of the Covenant, the box which contained the ten commandments (yes, the artifact Harrison Ford was searching for in Raiders of the Lost Ark) to Jerusalem, the city of David. Naturally David wanted the Ark near him, for it represented God's power and presumably, God's blessing. No question that David, master politician that he was, fully appreciated that having

the Ark with him would increase his standing among the people and his support by the religious authorities.

Yes David was clever, but David also was intensely committed to God. When we read the stories of David and Saul as recorded in the books of Samuel, something that jumps out at me is the fact that Saul, the first king of Israel, constantly referred to God not as someone he knew or worshipped but as a being whom Samuel the priest represented. Whenever Saul talked about God, he would only do so in Samuel's presence. Saul would constantly talk to Samuel about "the Lord your God" as if God had a relationship only with Samuel and not with Saul. In other words, in Saul's mind, God spoke to Samuel and Samuel spoke to Saul. Saul did not seem to know, or even want to know about "Samuel's God." If God was the owner, then Samuel was the General Contractor and Saul was just one of the craftsmen. Saul appeared to have or desire a personal relationship with God.

With David, however, the relationship dynamics were totally the opposite. David knew and appreciated that everything he had, the fact that he was king of Israel, was due solely to God. He knew perfectly well how improbable it was for someone of his background to be where he was. David knew he was the youngest of eight sons, hardly in a position to receive much from his family's wealth. He understood that his being a shepherd, the worst occupation you could have in those days, actually gave him the skills he needed to defeat Goliath and thereby launch his military career. He knew that his musical ability, his poetry, his friendship with Jonathan were all things he did not ask for or deserve.

No, David rightly concluded that his was a life that had been continually blessed by God. He recognized that all he had in the world was not the result of his birth or status or wealth. He knew that somehow, for some reason, God had chosen him to lead God's people and he would never fully know why.

Is it any wonder, then, that David had no problem calling the Lord his God? Is it any wonder that David had no problem writing some of the most powerful Psalms describing his relationship with God. After all, it is David who wrote the most well-known and beloved Psalm, Psalm 23: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Don't these words take on a whole new meaning when you realize that they were written by a man who was writing about his own experiences with God? In the 23rd Psalm, David is unquestionably referring to his own walk with God and all the triumphs and difficulties he has been through. As I mentioned last week, David was a man who made many mistakes. He was a rapist and a murderer. He oversaw the deaths of thousands. God declared that David was unworthy to build the temple because of all of the blood on his hands.

Yet David never forgot or abandoned his relationship with God.

And that his why David danced.

When we understand the story of David and everything he endured, we can understand that David danced when bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem for every reason human beings dance. David danced for joy because he was king and had the extraordinary privilege of leading God's chosen people. David danced for sorrow because he personally lost his best friend and countless soldiers in the many battles he fought. David danced for fear because he knew first hand that he did not control his God and his God could do anything God chose. David danced to show off because he knew he was attractive and had no problem displaying his body. In fact, his wife Michal, was apparently disgusted by David's display.

David, my friends, danced because David was an authentic, gifted human being who nevertheless knew he was the servant and creature of God Almighty. David danced because he was in love with life and in love with the God who made him and loved him and accepted him.

King David invites you and invites me this day, right now, to join him in dancing before the living God. David was far from perfect, but then, neither am I and neither are you. David made some terrible mistakes, but then, I have made terrible mistakes and I think most of you would also admit you have made terrible mistakes. David did not always put God first. David could be a conniving politician. David did not hesitate sacrificing human lives to achieve his objectives. Toward the end of his life, David even ordered the death of his loyal chief lieutenant, Joab, because he knew that Joab would do terrible things if he gained power. David's ethics were questionable and his motives were not always pure — just like ours. But David, though imperfect, always loved the Lord.

In short David's dance was the dance of a man who fully embraced his flawed humanity and fully embraced the God who created and loved him. He was ashamed of neither and so he danced. King David invites you to accept you humanity with its glories and faults and dance before God.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.