

“Dancing for Joy”

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

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The Ark of the Covenant is the vault-like structure that was built to hold the Ten Commandments! It is described in great detail in Exodus 25. Now, in the setting of King David’s time, it was understood that where the Ark of the Covenant lies, there is where the presence of God may be found! The stone tablets with The Decalogue inscribed upon them, the ones Moses carried down from Mt. Sinai, were considered the holy of holies. As long as the Ark of the Covenant was safely housed within the Hebrew community, all was well.

But the Ark of the Covenant had been stolen by the Philistines. That which had given the community its identity and its strength and its hope had been carried off! The Center of Spiritual Life had been ripped out of the heart of the community! We can only begin to imagine the sense of dread that hung over Jerusalem. The stories of how the Philistines pulled off this infamous heist and how David managed to retrieve it are grand stories and you will want to read every word of them this afternoon! The text for today is the tail end of the story, the part where David dances with all his might as he parades triumphantly into Jerusalem! The Ark of the Covenant is rolled into the city on a new cart with new wheels, and David leads the way, dancing with all his might!

What does that look like? Dancing with all your might? Does it look like the YMCA dance? The Macarena? A Sufi dance? Does it look like the Jitterbug? The Charleston? Is it a Snoopy dance? Maybe it’s all of those wrapped into one; one exuberant explosion of arms and legs and neck and chest and feet and hands and fingers! David danced with all his might!

He pulled off his clothes; his jewelry went flying; his sandals came untied. What could make a person go bananas like that?

At that time...1000 B.C...only one thing could inspire such raw exaltation...the return of the Ark of the Covenant, the return of the very Presence of God.

In 2006, what is the one thing that would cause you to dance with all your might? What is the one thing that would cause you to leap from your seat and dance down the aisle causing your neighbors to wonder, 'what in heaven's name has gotten into her?'

Whatever that one thing might be, my best guess is that it would reveal where you have found the Presence of God. It is in finding God's Presence that any of us has a reason for dancing with all our might!

In a way, this is a strong argument for the inclusion of liturgical dance in our worship life. Using a little imagination, one might argue that this is why we have two aisles in our church, so there's plenty of room for people to dance their way in on Sunday mornings! Imagine! Dancing to reveal God's presence in your life! Imagine yourself dancing into the church, carrying the Ark of the Covenant, being the one responsible for embodying the sacred!

The cover story in the Hartford Courant on Thursday featured the release of a man who had served 18 years in prison for a crime he did not commit. DNA evidence proved beyond a doubt he had not committed the heinous crime of which he had been convicted. The newspaper photographer's camera caught the smile on his face. But if we had been there, we would have seen a David dance. We would have witnessed a free soul dancing with all his might, down the courthouse steps, out into the street, and all across town! I imagine he's dancing his way into a church in the Hartford area this very minute!

I asked the deacons to hang that particular banner this morning. I call it the dancing banner. I love its lines. I love its feelings of joy and peace and delight. I love what it stirs within me. I love how in 1973 something happened that inspired the creation of this banner. Something happened! The Presence of God was made known. The sacred pushed its way through. Two people danced to demonstrate their encounter with the holy. Two people danced to announce the return of the Ark of the Covenant to their lives.

I could do the research and discover what actually inspired that dancing banner. There's probably someone here right now who can educate us. But I choose to use my imagination this morning.

I choose to let those dancers be two parents who have finally let go of being super critical of their child and thereby have seen for the first time the Presence of God in her, and that has made all the difference. And they have danced their way into the church because they can't help it!

I choose to let those dancers be a Palestinian and an Israeli. They have laid down their stones and have spoken with each other from the heart. They have discovered each other's humanity and thereby have seen for the first time the other's divinity, and they no longer wish to injure the other. They have danced their way into God's peace.

I choose to let those dancers be a high school student and a principal who have gone head to head over authority issues, who have duked it out over issues of autonomy, who have agreed to disagree, and now have come to a place of mutual respect. They surprise themselves by dancing together because they are an unlikely pairing, but is it not in the unlikely pairings that the Presence of God is revealed?

I choose to let the dancers be two aspects of one person. The one on the right is the part of the person who wants to take his share of the inheritance and get out of town, spend it foolishly, differentiate himself from his mother and father; the other is the part of the person who wants desperately to remain right at home in the security of the nest. These two parts of the same person find each other and embrace each other and thereby experience the wholeness God seeks for all of us. And the two become as one. And there is a dance that marks the return of the Ark of the Covenant.

When David danced into Jerusalem that day, the crowds turned out to see him and to rejoice with him and to welcome the restoration of the Ten Commandments. But there was one in that crowd who loathed David. It was Saul's daughter, Michal. She had hated David since David's ascendancy to her father's throne. And she found an opportunity to confront him that day! She accused him of making a spectacle of himself, of drawing attention to his own good looks, to his own dancing ability. She put him down for acting like a spoiled child, for dancing to attract the attention of all the city's maidens.

But David defends himself, saying, "I have danced for the Lord, to bring glory and honor to God alone."

Sometimes, when we dance, there are the detractors, the ones who don't get it. We are not to be deterred by the detractors. We are to dance with all our might! We are to dance for joy! Whenever we encounter the one thing that we name as the Presence of God, we have permission to kick up our heels and dance!

In the greatest of hope, Amen!