

“The Lord of The Dance”

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

Mark 6:14-29

David, dressed in a linen priestly vest,

danced with all his strength before the LORD.

*This is how David and the entire house of Israel brought up the LORD's chest
with shouts and trumpet blasts.*

2 Samuel 6:14-15

O God,

Teach us to dance. Teach us to dance, will you?

Teach us to use the gifts you have given us and to live fully.

Amen

Our Office Manager, Penny Timson, does a weekly blog on our Facebook page where she does a reflection on our UCC “Stillspeaking” devotional as well as a “teaser” intro to my sermon theme.

Well, she looked at the two scripture texts for this Sunday and was wondering what positive connection could be made between dancing and the death of John the Baptist.

According to legend, Herod's stepdaughter – Salome, did the “Dance of the Seven Veils” - a belly dance for him and his cronies; And when he foolishly made a drunken promise to her, his wife Herodias took the opportunity to have John the Baptist put to death. She had it in for John since he spoke out publicly against Herod & Herodias for their illicit marriage because she was his brother Philip's wife.

When Salome asked for John's head, Herod realized he couldn't back out without looking weak in the eyes of his powerful guests.

Not much edifying about the significance of dance there...

Dancing doesn't do much better in today's lesson from 2nd Samuel, either – another example of sexy dancing, this time by a guy – by King David himself. After all, David's wife became angry with him for showing off in front of all the Jerusalem ladies, and so she wouldn't have any more to do with him.

Soon after their estrangement, David got mixed up in a messy affair with one of them named Bathsheba, which led to her husband Uriah getting set up for an ambush in battle.

Though there sad outcomes in these particular stories – however directly or indirectly related to dancing itself, dancing is still a metaphor for life.

Willard, p,2

Sure there are missteps from time to time,
and we may step on each other's toes in the process,
but everybody is called out onto the dancefloor to live the best we can
regardless of the circumstances –
God calls us out there to dance the best we can.

Both Salome and David danced with passion, joyfully lost in the moment,
and though there were consequences,
they were celebrating life!

Prominently displayed in the Narthex this morning, is an original painting
that was donated to our church, entitled, "David Dancing" by Edna Hibel.
This marvelous artist lived to be 98, passing away last December;
She was a prolific artist having 2,000 paintings, sculptures, and ceramics
of her own work on display in her own museum
in Palm Beach, Florida where she lived for 45 years.

The website for her museum says...

*Edna celebrated her 97th birthday on Monday, January 13, 2014
at the Hibel Museum of Art with
a high tea and a free concert of Brazilian music.*

<http://www.hibel.com/aboutartist.htm>

'Brazilian music' – sounds like something you dance to!

I don't know if Edna was a dancer,
but I found an anecdote by her son about how she became a painter...
*Because she was so good at math,
she would be done well before the rest of the class, frustrating her teacher.
"The teacher told her,
"Would... you like to paint, Edna?" ...
[He] handed her some paper, brushes, watercolor paints
and an issue of Good Housekeeping magazine,
and she painted a remarkable likeness of the magazine cover.*

[From then on, her son said,]

*"She... must have walked around with a pencil and paintbrush in hand
after that" ...*

<http://www.palmbeachdailynews.com/news/news/local-obituaries/artist-edna-hibel-plotkin-dies-at-97/njNHx/>

I would say that – as Edna Hibel found her gift and worked to bring it out,
she started dancing with life.

When you get passed the pre-requisites – especially of someone else's expectations,
and you are not self-conscious, worrying about what other people think,
then you are authentically alive, self-actualized– even born again.

Willard, p,3

Everybody's got it – everybody's got some gift,
maybe it's not in being able to play Carnegie Hall or compete in the Olympics,
or in any kind of performance,
but we all have some gift from the Creator.

Even just listening and just being a good audience for someone else can be a gift
you share with others in a way that can have creative consequences.

In a way, that's a form of dancing – like dancing with a partner;
To be a good dance partner, you have to listen to the beat
and watch the other person to play off what they do.

When we are authentically ourselves we are more open to help others do the same
and when you do, then you are being more like Christ.

Jesus was somebody who was present with the people he was with,
living out his potential at the same time,
responding to life's challenges and beauty,
doing what a messiah does – healing, teaching, and wonderworking.

A few weeks ago in one of our Gospel texts,
we heard Jesus say it was good for the disciples that he would be leaving them.
In his place, the disciples would have the benefit of the Holy Spirit to guide them;
And he said that they would do greater things than even he had done.

The bulletin cover art today is the basic design for my entry to an art contest in 1999
that was on the theme of “Jesus at 2000”.

Sister Wendy Beckett an art historian who had a show on Public TV then,
was to be one of the judges.

It was a week to go, and I was sitting in a diner in Mystic, CT
when I came up with an idea of Christ crucified on the world.

I drew it on a napkin, but later, I thought... The Millennium, Y2K bugs,
the Apocalypse, and End of the World...? Nah! I need to see Jesus dancing!

There were a lot of factors that went into this interpretation of Jesus Christ –
the most important is a line from the hymn, “The Lord of The Dance”.

“It's hard to dance with the world on your back...”,
but this Jesus makes it look easy and I wanted to show him looking
joyful, fearless, and defiant for the sake of justice & peace.

I have drawn him to be a “black” Jesus – as a reminder that Christ is other than me;
His hair is pulled back into a ponytail like the most ancient icons of him,
but he is dressed like a Third World guy of our own time –
actually like the movie character, Zorba the Greek.

Willard, p,4

If you have ever been to a Greek wedding and stayed for the dancing,
there will be somebody who knows how to lead the dance,
arms outstretched like Zorba,
and with a handkerchief for the next person to hold in the line of dancers.
This person will lead everyone in a line, twisting and circumnavigating
throughout the room in spiral and circular paths.

By the way, I was shown a model for how the planets of our solar system move
and did you know that they don't move in fixed circles around the Sun,
but in spirals?

So, my picture happens to anticipate the celestial motion of the Earth
in the general direction of Jesus' right hand as the Universe expands outward –
leading us figuratively, metaphorically, even scientifically, to God.

There is an ancient philosophical concept called the “music of the spheres”
which describes physical reality in terms of an inaudible “musical” structure.
This was put forth by the 6th Century BCE Greek philosopher Pythagoras –
who gave us the Pythagorean theorem
and even a system for tuning musical instruments.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pythagorean_tuning

This seems to be in agreement with modern quantum physics' “string theory”
such that particles and gravity can be described in terms of vibrating “strings”.

Quantum theory looks at physical matter in terms of particles
that can be broken down from molecules to atoms to protons, neutrons,
orbiting electrons, and still further to fermions, bosons,
the so-called “God particle”, and an as yet to be discovered “graviton”.

We have all heard of $E=mc^2$ such that energy equals mass times the speed of light,
but another equation describes a constant relationship
of energy in terms of frequency – or harmonics.

Solid matter is not really solid, but subatomic particles constantly in motion
constantly dancing to the tune that began with The Big Bang
“In the Beginning...”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum_mechanics

The Universe is still unfolding according to this harmonious symmetry
that we believe God set into motion.

Meanwhile, life on Earth unfolds often imperfectly discordant and disharmonious,
yet with its strands of bittersweet, bold, and beautiful strains, too,
that we can yet dance to.

We are invited onto the dance floor of life, to find that rhythm that is our own,
and dance joyfully – live joyfully like David,
“with all our strength before the One Who Is God.”

Willard, p.5

At the end of the movie, “Zorba the Greek” when the island village’s plan for a logging commercial venture comes crashing down,
Zorba and his protegee, Basil, are alone on the beach amidst the ruins.

And Basil says to him,

“Teach me to dance... Will you?”

Zorba says,

“Dance? Did you say. ‘Dance’? Come on my boy. [snapping fingers] Together...
[music joins in] Let’s go. Op!”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UV6HVMRmdk>

OPA! Penny put that word on the website as a little contest to see if anyone knows what it means.

It’s an acronym that means,

“Omnia prosevchi agape!” – “A universal prayer for love”,
“A universal prayer for peace”...

Amen

*Our first lesson is 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12^b-19,
which comes from the Common English Bible translation.
It tells about how King David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem
as a joyous celebration with music and dancing...*

Once again David assembled the select warriors of Israel,
30,000 strong.
David and all the troops who were with him set out for Baalah [Bay-al-ah],
which is Kiriath-jearim [Keer-ee-yath-jee- ar-im] of Judah,
to bring [the Ark, or] God's chest up from there –
the chest that is called by the name of the LORD of heavenly forces,
who sits enthroned on the winged creatures.
They loaded God's chest on a new cart
and carried it from Abinadab's [A-bin-uh-dabs] house,
which was on the hill.
Uzzah [Oo-zah] and Ahio [A-hee-o], Abinadab's sons,
were driving a new cart.
Uzzah was beside God's chest while Ahio was walking in front of it.
Meanwhile, David and the entire house of Israel
celebrated in the LORD's presence with all their strength,
with songs, zithers, harps, tambourines, rattles, and cymbals.

So David went and brought God's chest up
from Obed-edom's [Obed-ee-doms] house to David's City with celebration.
Whenever those bearing the chest advanced six steps,
David sacrificed an ox and a fatling calf.
David, dressed in a linen priestly vest,
danced with all his strength before the LORD.
This is how David and the entire house of Israel brought up the LORD's chest
with shouts and trumpet blasts.
As the LORD's chest entered David's City, Saul's daughter Michal
was watching from a window.
She saw King David jumping and dancing before the LORD,
and she lost all respect for him.
The LORD's chest was brought in and put in its place inside the tent
that David had pitched for it.
Then David offered entirely burned offerings in the LORD's presence
in addition to well-being sacrifices,
he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of heavenly forces.
He distributed food among all the people of Israel –
to the whole crowd, male and female –
each receiving a loaf of bread, a date cake, and a raisin cake.
Then all the people went back to their homes.

Let us be guided and challenged by these words...

Mark 6:14-29

¹⁴ King Herod heard of it; for Jesus' name had become known.

Some said,

“John the baptizer has been raised from the dead;
that is why these powers are at work in him.”

¹⁵ But others said,

“It is Eli'jah.”

And others said,

“It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.”

¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it he said,

“John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.”

¹⁷ For Herod had sent and seized John,

and bound him in prison for the sake of Hero'di-as, his brother Philip's wife;
because he had married her.

¹⁸ For John said to Herod,

“It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.”

¹⁹ And Hero'di-as had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him.

But she could not,

²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man,
and kept him safe.

When he heard him, he was much perplexed; and yet he heard him gladly.

²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday

gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers
and the leading men of Galilee.

²² For when Hero'di-as' daughter came in and danced,

she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl,

“Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will grant it.”

²³ And he vowed to her,

“Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.”

²⁴ And she went out, and said to her mother,

“What shall I ask?”

And she said,

“The head of John the baptizer.”

²⁵ And she came in immediately with haste to the king, and asked, saying,

“I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.”

²⁶ And the king was exceedingly sorry; but because of his oaths and his guests
he did not want to break his word to her.

²⁷ And immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard
and gave orders to bring his head.

He went and beheaded him in the prison,

²⁸ and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl;
and the girl gave it to her mother.

²⁹ When [John's] disciples heard of it, they came and took his body,
and laid it in a tomb.