

2 Samuel 5: 1-5; 6: 1-5
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To Dance with the King

We met his great grandmother last week, and this morning we meet David, King David to be more precise. David occupies more of the biblical text than any other figure. His story—filled with drama, joy, and disappointment is a high point in ancient Israel's story. You may recall that Ruth's story is set in the time of the judges. After years of frustration and corruption, the people beg God for a king, and reluctantly, God agrees. Saul becomes king and quickly begins looking out for himself and his interests more than those of the people. He also decides he knows better than Samuel, God's prophet and even better than God himself. So God rejects Saul and sends Samuel to anoint his new choice from among Jesse's sons. Jesse's strapping boys parade before Samuel, but God's chosen one is not there. When Samuel asks Jesse if he has any other sons, Jesse mentions that his youngest, the runt of the litter is off in the fields with the sheep. The shepherd boy returns, and God says, "He's the one." Samuel anoints David as God's chosen king. David does not take the throne right away. He serves in Saul's court and carries Saul's armor. By the time we meet David this morning, Saul has died, and David has emerged as a war hero. He has already been welcomed as king over the northern tribes. In the first part of today's text, his coronation is almost complete. One piece of the puzzle remains. It is not enough that David and the people make Jerusalem their home. The city is not fully the center of the kingdom until the presence of God dwells there, too.

As some of us learned or re-learned in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, tradition holds that the Ark of the Covenant is a chest containing the tablets on which the Ten Commandments are written. This chest is elaborately decorated and was carried with the people of ancient Israel

throughout their wandering days. While no one would claim that it contained God—they knew better than to think any box could hold God—this chest signifies God’s presence with the people in a tangible way. After recapturing the Ark from the Philistines, the Israelites tucked it away for safe keeping for twenty years. Now David is determined to return the Ark, the presence of God to its rightful place at the center of the people.

One could well argue that David is calculating, that he wants to centralize his grip on power by being the one to place the Ark in the center of the city that he has renamed the City of David. But then there’s that whole dancing thing. Here and elsewhere, we see David dancing with abandon, leading the parade and giving himself over completely to joy and praise. Each dance is inspired by the Ark, the holy reminder of God’s word and God’s presence. The power of the moment and the memory of what God has done leads David to dance and sing and shout without any concern for the watchful eyes of others.

My friend Meg tells a story about one summer afternoon at Camp Grier, a Presbyterian camp not far from here:

Bunkhouse was really the worst group you could have as a counselor at Camp Grier. They were an [awkward] age. In between the too-little to go on long-hikes-and-over-nights and the old-enough to want to be friends with their counselors. Camp Grier, through First Presbyterian Church Charlotte, had [and may still have] a long tradition of sending inner-city...kids to camp, many of whom hadn’t had much experience with leaves and bugs. It was the confluence of a tricky mix of kids, a week in Bunkhouse, and an extreme amount of rain that was the context for the moment when dance became holy for me. I’m not a big liturgical dance person. Just not my thing. What happened to

be my thing that afternoon was breaking rules and dancing to Michael Jackson. We were supposed to be having a cookout at the Bunkhouse shelter. You were not supposed to have music-playing devices at camp. And you were definitely not supposed to have Bunkhouse boys and Bunkhouse girls in the same, well, Bunk. One of the girls, instead of hunting for soaked firewood, snuck into the cabin and turned on music, and it happened to be [Michael Jackson] *the King*—which apparently was the bridge between the first-timer-city kids and the I-come-to-camp-every-summer ones. I noticed boys walking into the girls bunk and walked over with my reprimanding voice in tune, but instead, you couldn't help it, you just joined in. We never cooked that afternoon, instead, we ate plain hot dog buns and un-roasted marshmallows all together on the floor of Bunkhouse after one [heck] of a dance party.¹

“Dance became holy that afternoon,” Meg says. It wasn't beautifully choreographed. It was goofy and awkward and messy and beautiful. It did not bridge every division forever, nor did it solve all the world's problems. But in that unscripted moment, joy sprang forth surprising everyone in the room.

Some of us meet those moments at weddings when all the planning is over. The caterer showed and so did the bride and groom. Family members who too often see each other at funerals have a good reason to dance and celebrate that for a brief shining moment a new chapter of love has gathered them in one place. I remember smiling until my cheeks hurt as I watched my precious grandparents whirl around the dance floor at my cousin's wedding. And then I laughed until my sides ached upon noticing later that my grandmother's slip had fallen

¹ Meg Peery McLaughlin in her paper for the Well, 2015.

around her ankles. I learned the Texas two-step and watched my parents do the twist. Dance becomes a holy thing when deep love and joy take over even for a moment.

In the Bunkhouse and at that wedding, the dancing sprang from love and joy. David's dancing, it seems, springs from love and joy with some passion thrown in. David Brooks once wrote, "A life of passion happens when an emotional nature meets a consuming vocation."² For some that consuming vocation or calling is art or music. For others it's teaching or medicine or parenting, just to name a few. For King David, it is praise. Brooks continues:

To be emotional is to attach yourself to something you value supremely but don't fully control. To be passionate is to put yourself in danger.³

It is dangerous to be passionate **and** to live that passion out loud, to let down your guard and wear your heart not simply on your sleeve but holding it up for everyone to see. It is also dangerous to give our whole selves to something—or Someone—we do not control.

We Presbyterians are very good at studying and learning and discussing what it means to be faithful. We tend to prefer religion of the decent and orderly variety. King David in all his messiness would hardly be our first choice of patron saint or role model. He is brash and impulsive and ruthless. He takes and takes some more. That said, he is also exuberant and willing to confess his sins when he falls short. So, we still have something to learn from him.

Each month when we receive the Noisy Offering, we invite the children to scamper and skip with coins clanging in their buckets. And we smile, and laugh, and let down our guard a bit. Somehow the ways of children give us permission to give ourselves over to joy and praise and

² David Brooks, "Lady Gaga and the Life of Passion" <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/23/opinion/lady-gaga-and-the-life-of-passion.html>

³ Brooks, quoting Martha Nussbaum in *Upheavals of Thought*

even passion. Their enthusiasm emboldens our enthusiasm; their passion fuels ours. Through them we remember why we are here in the first place. We are beloved children of God who have gathered here to praise God. Full stop. This God has given us strength for the journey. This God has given us loved ones and community. This God has given us hope for tomorrow. We have gathered here to worship that God, to praise that God. Worship is not about going through the motions or checking church off the to-do list for the week. Nor is worship necessarily about conga lines or ecstatic hand-waving. Worship is about praising the God who stands and stays at the center of our lives no matter what. When we worship, when we pledge, when we offer ourselves and the work of our lives to God, we “attach [ourselves] to something [or rather Someone we] value supremely but don’t [in the least bit] control.” When we give ourselves to God fully, with passion and joy, it is messy, it is risky, and it is unspeakably beautiful and deeply holy.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the people of ancient Israel have taken a long and winding and treacherous journey to get to this moment, and a long journey still lies ahead. Things will not stay golden. And yet, here in this place, the people know that God is with them. The long-promised king is leading the way. The long-promised home is now a reality. The word of God is in their midst. In this moment, how can they NOT praise God?

We have not wandered in the wilderness for forty years, nor have we battled the Philistines, but our journey has been a winding one too. We’ve lost too many friends to death or division. We’ve wondered about budgets and worried over balance sheets. We have taken some wrong turns, and we have hit some dead ends. The world is beyond fraught right now, as is our nation. Hearts are breaking, war is escalating, and nerves are raw. Dancing may seem

inappropriate at the moment. And yet we are here. And so is God. Still. With and for us. With and for the entire world. Maybe it's time to give ourselves back over fully—minds, bodies, hearts, and lives—to the one who has promised to be with us always. Maybe for a moment we can find a way to join the king and dance.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.