

## 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12-19 “Dance Like You Mean It!”

I'm a horrible dancer. I love music. I can keep a rhythm. You have to if you play any kind of musical instrument. I just can't convince my feet to go along with the rhythm in my head. I've been a part of churches that were all about dancing though. And when I say, “been a part of,” I mean “visited.” And when I mean “visited,” I mean I was there on behalf of the Regional staff of the Christian Church in Virginia where I worked. You might be thinking, “What?! What Disciple church has dancing?” Take a guess. Yup. African-American Disciples churches. We usually sing about four songs in our service. Maybe five. Mount Olive East Christian Church outside of Martinsville, Virginia sings four or five songs just to get warmed up. And those opening songs are catchy. They get people clapping. And clapping leads to swaying. Swaying leads to hands in the air. Hands in the air leads to standing up with hands in the air. And that, of course, leads to dancing. During offering time, they don't pass out collection plates like we do. The plates stay up on the table and people dance down the aisle to give their offering. I don't know about you, but I'd feel a little self-conscious if I was a part of a church where dancing felt almost like a requirement to be considered “in.” But then again, I've also got to own up to the fact that I struggle with self-consciousness in a lot of other areas in my life. I'm getting better about this the older I get, but I still sit in a booth at a restaurant instead of a table. I sit on the aisle seat in a movie theater. And I still find myself standing by a wall in a crowded room instead of in the middle.

So when I read this story about King David dancing around in his underwear, I cringe. I think, “Good for him for worshipping the Lord, but ... daggone ... does he really have to take it that far!?” I have great sympathy for Michal, his wife, who watched him and “despised him in her heart.” Spouses can be so embarrassing! He's the King of Israel for goodness sake! All eyes are on him, and whether she likes it or not, that means all eyes are on her. I may not feel her disgust, but I can for sure relate to feeling ... *uncomfortable* whenever I'm in the presence of folks

who are so expressive about their faith. My guess is that I'm not alone in my feelings. Because the very fact that we meet here and worship in the style that we do suggests to me that many of us are probably uncomfortable with spontaneous dancing and loud hallelujahs. It's hard enough to get folks to clap during a song, never mind the effort it takes to get you all to clap on the second and fourth beat instead of the first and third. We are who we are, and I love you all deeply no matter what. We've all absorbed so many cultural norms about what is and is not the correct way to listen, observe, worship or pray that it's hard for us to embrace other modes of worship.

In *our* society it's normal and polite to sit quietly while someone else is talking. It's considered rude to interject a comment when someone else is talking unless it's a conversation between close and forgiving friends. It's rude to make noises while other people are being quiet. It's more than a little odd to be the only one dancing in a crowd; in fact, in our society very few people dance in public outside a dance hall or a night club. And if they do, they're usually intoxicated. We have a lot of unspoken rules. We have rules about how much space our bodies take up, how far away from others we sit or stand, how much noise we can make and when. We even have rules about the floor. I know that sounds strange, but think about it. Our culture tends to think of the floor as a dirty place. Few of us ever sit or lie on the floor, let alone eat off it. That's why we sit in church, and in our houses, in chairs.

Another issue that we have hang-ups about is money. We're downright prudish about money. We never talk about it. Some people think it's crass to give it as a gift. We're secretive about how much we have or earn. And yet, we obsess over it and spend so much time and attention concerned about it. I also suspect that a lot of us believe that those who don't have enough money are somehow at fault. Or at least until we find ourselves in the same situation.

We're even prudish about our faith. "One must never speak of politics or religion." This one seems to have gone out the window lately. I think

what it might have started out to be was, “Don’t shove your religious denomination or your political party down someone’s throat,” and I agree with that. But because it’s been done so much, we can’t even seem to sit down and ask simple questions like, “How do you suppose Jesus would feel about this” when faced with public policy that seems the polar opposite of what Jesus taught his followers? We can’t even do that without someone calling foul!

There are tons of other rules I could list, many unspoken but all of them affect the way we live nonetheless, which means they affect how we worship and how we express our faith. In and of themselves, there isn’t anything particularly wrong with a lot of these rules, but (and this is a very important but) *they are not Christian*. They are Old English cultural rules that are so ingrained in our society that they’ve become virtually invisible. Good citizens that we are, we have internalized them so successfully that, even at church, we live most of them out without even being aware that we’re doing it.

Here’s where we run into some challenges ... especially when we’re trying to figure out how we can best live a “Christian life.” See, the first Christians were not like us *at all*. On the one hand, they had quite different cultural norms; and on the other, they challenged many of those norms in order to respond to the call of Christ in their lives. For example, many early Christians were celibate. It’s true! It’s a wonder the Jesus movement even survived the first 50 years! See, they believed that the power of Eros could be effectively channeled into Christian service. All that ... energy that gets bottled up? Make it work for Jesus!

These early Christians weren’t embarrassed to talk about money either. Just like Jesus, they talked about money all the time! Did you know that “Satan” is only mentioned 35 times in the Bible? But the responsible stewardship of money and resources is mentioned over 2,000 times. Most early Christians shared their resources. People don’t like it when I frame it this way, but they were sort of like a hippie commune! Everyone knew how much everyone else earned because it was all put

into the pot and shared according to each one's needs. We learned about that in our Acts Bible study last month. We also learned that this practice didn't last long either. The early Christians weren't embarrassed to talk about their faith either. None of us would be Christian today were it not for those first missionaries who never stopped talking about Jesus and who risked their lives to do so. In fact, I'd say that a lot of the early Christians "went too far" in expressing their faith. They made radical decisions that make most of us cringe.

Of course, some of these sort of folks are still with us today. We certainly know people who've experimented with communal living. We know others who've embraced celibacy. We know many who talk freely about their faith; and still others who have made different radical decisions based on God's call on their lives. While a part of me cheers them on, another part of me feels uncomfortable with the extravagance of those decisions. And, unfortunately, some have taken it to an extreme where people's lives have been unnecessarily lost because too much power was given to one leader who became intoxicated by their power. We've seen far too many David Koreshes and Jim Jones' in our lifetimes to even *consider* anything so radical.

And yet, we're still faced with the question, "How are we supposed to live?" Should we live meager lives bounded by our cultural limitations that encourage us to stay quiet, and polite and demure? That warn us never to rock the boat even when there are grave injustices happening right in front of us? That tell us to remain silent about money? That reward us for participating unthinkingly in the dominant cultural norms? Should we keep our faith private and innocuous? Maybe King David's wife Michal felt like that. I have no doubt she was religiously observant and faithful in her own way, just like most of us, but she still couldn't help feeling embarrassed by her husband's "unchained and almost unclothed" exuberance.

It's clear from this story about David's dance that we're not called to a life of invisibility or submission to the norm. We are called to *greater*

things. We are called to live exuberantly, generously reflecting the good things God has done. God is not asking us to be model citizens of any human system. Instead, we are invited to become model citizens in the reign of God, which transcends and critiques all cultures. In such a reign, we might find ourselves re-considering all sorts of assumptions in the light of God's values. What value do we place on money and how we use it? Do we truly rely on God, or do we just pay lip service to the concept? What is hospitality, how do we exercise it, and to whom do we extend it? What are some of the injustices that are going on in the world that are worth risking our social standing by participating in open protest? How does our work reflect our values? How does our faith impact our family lives? Our prayer lives? What do we invest time and money in, and why? What does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ? And the list of questions goes on.

God wants our lives to overflow with glory and splendor, and they will do so when we are living out our answers to these sorts of questions to the best of our ability. If there are times when we realize that we need to be embarrassing – if we need to talk about money, sing loudly, question the dominant values of our society, shout our faith from the rooftops, lift our hands in worship, shout amen, or like King David, do a little dance in the aisle – then that is what we must do.

The good news is that, in doing so, we will be radically transformed into Christ's own image -- radiant and splendid. While it might make people notice us, and even judge us, that's nothing to be embarrassed about at all.