

July 11th, 2021

2 Samuel 6:1-19 “Dancing With Purpose”

“You’re not like ... *other* ministers I know.” I hear that a lot. Sometimes it’s meant as a compliment. Sometimes it’s not. I think part of it might have something to do with not growing up in the church. Some say that my ignorance of church culture is how I’ve survived 25 years of ordained ministry. Others wonder how I lasted 5 years without that foundation. One of the first things I learned about church culture is how many *sides* there are. And I’m not talking about “multi-faceted diversity sides” either. I’m talking about how many things in the church boil down to being on one side of an issue or the other. One of the first things I experienced in church were the “worship wars.” What *side* are you on when it comes to music? Hymns or choruses? Contemporary or traditional? Quiet and seated, or loud and dancing in the aisles?

The contemporary dancing in the aisle people love the story Mary read. It is foundational to their belief. The story takes place early on in King David’s reign. He managed to unite the 12 tribes of Israel after the chaos of being under King Saul’s rule. Remember that Israel wanted a king so they could be like all the other nations, even when God said, “No.” They demanded one anyway, so God said, “Fine. If you want to be like the other nations, understand that you’re going to have problems like other nations too.” Pretty soon it became evident that King Saul would have to be ousted, or else Israel would collapse before it even got off the ground. Fortunately, God chose David *ahead of time* to replace Saul when Israel looked like it would collapse.

When David finally became King, he started setting up his capital in Jerusalem, which was neutral town that meant nothing to any of the warring tribes. So the first thing he did to set up this capital was to dust off the Ark of the Covenant and bring it to town. Let’s have an Ark of the Covenant refresher here for those of you who haven’t seen *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The Ark of the Covenant was a gold-covered chest that symbolized the presence of God amongst the Israelites. It was built

while Moses and the people of Israel were in the wilderness after they escaped slavery in Egypt. Later, when Israel entered the Promised Land, they started believing that the Ark was the throne from which God commanded the heavenly armies. Why? Because when they took the Ark into battle, they won. Except when they didn't. It's complicated. But the important thing to know is that back in 1 Samuel 4-6 the Ark was captured by the Philistines who gave it back to the Israelites when really bad things started happening to them. So Israel hid it away at a place called Baale-Judah. That is until King David brought to Jerusalem so that Ark could have a permanent home instead of being carried all over the place like a good luck charm. David was determined to give the Ark and ultimately God the respect it deserved. That's why we've got this elaborate parade with 30,000 men carrying the Ark and making animal sacrifices every six paces. It was a big deal. The Ark had never had a permanent home, but now it will.

You know how people tell me, "You aren't like other ministers I know?" David got a lot of that too, except for him it was, "You aren't like other *kings* I know." But that was good! Because remember, God *didn't want* the people of Israel to have a garden variety ancient middle eastern king. That was Saul, and things certainly didn't end well for him. God chose David because David led his people more like a shepherd than a king. In other words, God appreciated David *because* he wasn't like other kings. Want to know something that other ancient middle eastern kings didn't do? They didn't dance around in underwear that only priests were allowed to wear when they brought the symbol of God's presence into their capital cities. And yet, here's David doing just that.

Now, some of you are looking a little concerned. "Jesse started this sermon out by saying he isn't like other ministers, now he's talking about David who isn't like other kings. But somehow dancing around in your underwear seems to be on the table too. Where are you going with this preacher?" Don't worry. I'm not going *there*. Have faith. The reason why dancing in the aisle worship people like this passage so much is so they can say, "See?! If it was okay for David to do it, then

why should we listen to people who say we should sit down and worship quietly?” There’s even a song that we sing up at camp called “Undignified” that basically says, “I’m going to dance and be crazy when I worship because that’s how David honored God!”

But remember what I said about churches having sides? David may be the hero for the “I prefer dancing and shouting when I worship” folks, but you can bet that the “I prefer quiet and contemplative worship” people have a hero too. Want to guess who their hero is in this story? That’s right. Michal. David’s first wife and the daughter of that terrible King Saul who almost ruined everything for Israel. She often gets cast as the nagging wife who is embarrassed because David was dancing frivolously in priestly underwear. I think there’s way more to this story than that. I want to get this image of Michal as the nagging wife off the table right now, because she does not deserve to get cast as the villain in this story. And no, I’m not going to start preaching a “dance has no place in worship” kind of sermon either. Let’s just clean the slate and pretend like there are no issues or sides in today’s lesson.

When I was preparing for today’s sermon, I read a couple of great articles by Walter Brueggemann and Wilda Gaffney about how this story is the beginning of David’s struggle with being “good king” and “bad king” at the same time. And this is something that would follow him throughout his entire reign. On one hand, this is David doing and being everything he should be. Last week we talked about how David cares for Israel like a shepherd. Here he is being a good example to his flock by worshipping God extravagantly and with all his strength. He is actually putting God first in this new kingdom he’s establishing which is something King Saul failed to do. What David is doing is wonderful. No one can doubt this. Here he is being the Good King. But how is this story also an example of David being the Bad King? This is where Michal comes into the picture. Part of the reason David is such a great King is because of Michal. Michal is the only woman in this whole history of Israel section, Judges through 1 Chronicles, who is described as one who loves another man. She is the only woman who ever

explicitly said, “I love David.” But that love is never returned. David would have rotted in Saul’s prison if Michal hadn’t helped him escape. She defied her own father and lied to him in order to save David’s life! She helped David overthrow her father so that *he* could be King. She cast her lot in with David instead of her father. Think about that.

Does she really detest him because of his dance? I believe that the reason Michal despises David is that after all she’s done for him ... after taking and using her love to escape and ultimately succeed her father on the throne, he has moved on to other women and other children. He will not return to her bed. He will not father children for her. She became a living widow as she watched him woo, seduce, and impregnate other women all around her. Michal was retrieved like property rather than being rescued to the loving embrace of the man she once loved. David is alive because of her but during that whole conflict between David and Saul she became just a pawn between two powerful men. Now David is coming back to Jerusalem with the Ark saying, “It’s God that’s doing all this.” And Michal is thinking, “Yeah, but I helped do some of this too.” You had this great procession with the Ark, and you’re coming in here with your wives and your slaves and all the things that make you look like a good King, but if it wasn’t for me, you’d still be in Saul’s prison. And sure, you can give all credit to God ... that’s cool ... that’s fair ... but don’t I deserve some recognition too? And I don’t think this is her saying, “Celebrate me” as much as it is her saying, “Yes, celebrate God. That’s good. That’s fine. Celebrate God through the Ark. It’s good that you’re bringing the Ark. But could you celebrate God for what God has done through me to save your life so you could sit on that throne?” And this isn’t a competition between God and Michal either. This isn’t even “Michal is jealous of God.” This is, “Michal is getting tired of being treated like property.”

I knew a guy once who worked for me at camp one summer. He grew up in the region’s youth and camping program. He was friendly, outgoing, social, loved his friends and family, but he was uncertain about the whole God thing. He grew up in church and had a solid foundation for a

relationship with God, but like many young adults, he needed to figure some things out for himself. Unfortunately, when he went to college, he developed an opioid addiction. Thankfully, he found a group of sober Christian young men who took him in, nurtured him and led him to faith in Jesus. But he took it a little further than most do and became so “into Jesus” that he started alienating people in his life including the people who had planted the seeds of faith in him in the first place: His pastor, his family, and his camp friends. When he came to camp looking for a summer job, I hired him. While he was there, he made sure everyone knew how much he was into Jesus. He was even critical of other Christians who didn’t seem to be as “into Jesus” as he was. He became one of the contemporary “dancing in the aisle” Christians who looked down on others who preferred a quieter, more contemplative faith. Was he sincere? Who was I to judge? His words and practices indicated that he loved Jesus. He made sure everyone saw him reading his Bible or praying over his meals. His relationship with God *seemed* great. But he disregarded his human relationships, and that didn’t seem good at all. He eventually slipped back into drug use, stole \$80 from the camp store and we never saw him again. I often wondered whether his extravagant displays of faith were all about God, or all about him.

When David brought the Ark into Jerusalem, I have no doubt that he was sincere about his relationship with God and that he wanted others to see that he was the priestly shepherd king that God called him to be. But I also think he dismissed and disregarded some very important human relationships, and this became a pattern in his life that would eventually lead to his downfall. Folks ... for sure, put God first. Dance before the Lord. Love the Lord with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your might, just like it says in the Law of Moses. But remember Jesus added, “And love your neighbor as yourself.” In other words, don’t disregard your human relationships in pursuit of your relationship with God. God knows your heart. You don’t need to prove the sincerity of your faith to anyone else, especially if it’s someone who may have helped you be who you are now.