

Sermon for July 12, 2008

“I Hope You Dance”

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

(SING) *I hope you still feel small when you stand beside the ocean. Whenever one door closes, I hope one more opens. Promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance. And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance. I hope you dance. I hope you dance.* (Lyrics to *I Hope You Dance*, Lee Ann Womack).

The song “I Hope you Dance” sung by Lee Ann Womack topped the country charts in 2000 and 2001. The reason... so many people could resound with its lyrics. The song’s refrain “I hope you dance” touches the hearts strings of all people because it challenges us all to throw caution to the wind and embrace the dance of life. In our scripture for today, David glorified God by leading the house of Israel in dance. **David, the King of Israel, was not afraid to dance before God and he models for us that faith filled worship happens when we accept God’s invitation to the dance of worship.**

In our Scripture, David and the House of Israel were on the final leg of their journey of transporting the Ark of God to Jerusalem. At this time, the Ark of God was believed to be the very “dwelling place of God.”¹ So you can imagine that transporting the dwelling place of God from Balee-Judah to Jerusalem must have been a very long journey for many reasons.

First, the very responsibility of carrying the object that hosted God must have weighed heavily on everyone’s mind. Also the men were afraid because right before David started to transport the ark, a carts man, Uzzuh, touched the Ark in a moment of forgetfulness, and he dropped dead. We know these men must have been scared, anxious, and tired. Yet we see David, the King of Israel dancing before God. Why would David be dancing at a time like this? One if

he got too close to the Ark when he was lost in the trance of his dance and then he too dropped dead?

But, David was dancing with joy, not for self gratification, but as a means to worship God. He was not dancing to improve his social status, like those who participate in “Dancing with the Stars” or “So You Think You Can Dance?” He was dancing because this was the way that he could fully glorify God. So, our Scripture today is not really about dance at all, but about the way that we worship God.

Many times in worship we forget who the audience is. The audience is not us, but it is God. We worship together as a body of Christ every Sunday in order to glorify God. In David’s time he was able to literally dance before God because God dwelled inside the Ark of God. In our time, worshipping God is more abstract because God’s presence is no longer in an Ark with mounted cherubim, but in the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What would it mean for us if we could dance before God like David did with the House of Israel? What would it look like for us to let go of all our pride and selfish ambition and fully worship God with our entire being?

When I was five I was in a ballet recital. Part of our dance included the use of a fan. We knew where we were supposed to stand based on the position of our fan on stage. The night of the recital came and the stage hands arranged our fans without realizing their significance. I stood by my fan, even though I knew it was in the wrong place. Then when the curtain opened I decided it was a good idea to run across the stage to get into my rightful position. This action caused me much embarrassment later when it was played over and over again at my daycare. Even though my running across the stage did not inhibit the dance that followed, this first

memory of dance in my life was tarnished by the embarrassment caused by a misplaced fan. To this day I do not like to dance.

I think one of the reason's is because when you dance you have to let go and trust. You have to not care about how you look or what your body is doing. You simply have to feel the music and give yourself up to it. This is the way we should all worship God.

When David was worshipping God through dance he did not simply dance at the beginning or at the end of his journey, but throughout it. Worship does not only occur on Sunday mornings in church. It happens when we come before God just as we are and give our lives to the dance of Christianity. Even when we have broken hearts or broken bones we can faithfully worship God because faith filled worship requires letting go of who we are and concentrating on whose we are. David knew this, and if he could dance before God wearing only an ephod cloth, then we too can come before God when all our faith has been stripped away.

Worship on Sunday morning can be an intimidating place. I think Bill and I have been the ones experiencing this emotion the most lately. Intimidation happens for many reasons, especially when we think that we are not good enough to worship God. But God our Creator made us and all He wants is for us to worship him with everything in us. There are also other distractions in worship. Do the microphones work? Is music being played at the appropriate time? Do the pastors know what they are doing? Is the person beside me more spiritual than me? Even though there may be many distracting events occurring in worship we have to remember that the reason we are there is to glorify God.

The great thing about worship is that it does not only take one form. Our Scripture today echoes this notion. David not only brought the Ark of God to Jerusalem with dancing, but with

“shouting” and the “sound of the trumpet “and other various musical instruments (2 Samuel 6:15). Even though one aspect of worship may not feed your soul there are other ways in worship that you can meet with God. For example, if you listen closely God will speak to you through prayer, singing, the Scriptures, and Christian community. Worshipping God becomes a lot less intimidating when we remember God does not judge the way we worship based on cultural norms, but by the way our hearts are oriented towards God.

We join the dance of worship when we allow the Holy Spirit to work through us so we can orient our hearts and minds towards God. This is why dance is such a great metaphor for Christian living, because the life of a dancer requires many of the same life practices that help equip us for effective faith filled worship.

Dancing requires self discipline; in order to be a good dancer you must practice for long hours. Dancing requires a life style that honors your body. In order to push your body to great dancing feats you must take care of yourself by having a healthy lifestyle and surrounding yourself with people who support you in your dancing endeavors. Dancing requires a large amount of time; if you are a dancer you schedule out times in your life that are specifically dedicated to all things dance related.

To be a truly excellent dancer you must be in touch with the world and other cultures in order to learn new moves, and different styles of dance. Dancing requires strength, endurance, and the courage to take risks. When we dance we take the risk of being rejected by others. That is the risk we take as Christians everyday.

I'm sure that not all of David's men or people in Jerusalem fully supported David when he chose to dance before God less than fully clad. Also in this Scripture David was rejected by Michal, the daughter of Saul by the hatred she felt for him in her heart.

Jesus experienced many different forms of rejection, the last being when he suffered for us on the cross. In our gospel reading for today we learned that John the Baptist was beheaded as the ultimate form of rejection due to a dance that was not used for the glory of God.

Just as David, Jesus, and John the Baptist were rejected by those who did not understand, we have encountered many people in our lives that reject us the minute they learn that we are Christians. Rejection comes in many different forms. It could come from those who walk by our church daily, yet never enter its doors. It can come from our family members who refuse to attend worship with us. It can be when we refuse to spend time with someone who we feel God is calling us to give our time to. Finally, rejection can happen when we forget who God is and that we are called to worship God with every part of our being.

Christians participate in worship as a dance through call and response. God calls all people because God loves all people. God called David, the youngest son of Jesse to defeat Goliath and to lead the Israelites into relationship with Him. God calls us to act out on our faith through joining with the body of Christ and the saints before us by embodying our faith through faith-filled worship. The good news is that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ God has invited us to the dance of Christian worship. So if you get the chance to sit it out and not accept God's invitation, OR to accept the invitation to dance with God through faith-filled worship with your entire being, I hope you dance Amen.

¹ *The New Interpreter's Biblical Commentary.*