

**The Rev. Christine Love Mendoza**  
**The Church of the Good Shepherd**  
**The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – July 11, 2021**  
**2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19 & Mark 6:14-29**

*Almighty God, we ask that you grant us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the next, life everlasting. Amen.*

It should be no surprise at all that I've been thinking of dancing this week. In both of our lessons today, dancing plays a prominent role. In the first passage we hear of King David dancing before the ark, rejoicing in God glory and presence with his body. David's wife, however, thinks he is merely making a fool of himself. In our Gospel lesson, we see King Herod captivated by the dancing of his wife's daughter. Herod was so moved by the dance he was willing to give her "half his kingdom." Scripture seems to suggest that dance has something to do with our humanity and our God. Moreover, dancing is one metaphor the Church has used for centuries to describe God's work of creation and our relationship to God.

Dance is a universal, transcultural human expression of emotion. It is an embodied, physical celebration of life and creation. Through dance, we are able to experience something like the transcendence of the restrictions of embodied life, even while rejoicing in the very physicality of our created and fragile humanity.

Dancing with a partner can be glorious, with the synchronization of bodies, in movement together and physically harmonizing with each other and the music. When done well, the collective composition of couples dancing together can seem to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. There is something spiritual in the experience – the heart lifts and is exalted, as the body synchronizes with another and the music.

As wonderful as it can be when dancing with another, sometimes there is simply nothing better than dancing by yourself. Do you remember when you were young and you would shut your door, turn up the music, and dance by yourself in your room? Oh, my! Free of the repressive fear of judgement and embarrassment and just letting it all fly – being swept away by the music and the movement of my body. Rejoicing in simply being alive and reveling in the pure physicality of it all, even while tasting transcendence. I would dance with abandon – wild and free – until I would just collapse on the floor, exhausted and panting.

Do you know what I'm talking about? I think you do. And here is a little secret, I still do this. Perhaps with a touch more self-consciousness and a bit less wildness and exuberance, but even now I turn up the music, shut the door, and DANCE! Those of you who have been around church on quiet Friday mornings may have noticed loud music coming from my office. Those of you who tuned into my Friday Noonday Prayer livestreams may have noticed my love of music... and have probably caught me a few times dancing in the background. (Perhaps even with a cat or dog!) Those of you who remember our Winter Dance Fest with the Tower House Band two February's ago, may remember that I danced until the music ended – so much that my left knee hurt for two weeks afterwards.

To me, there is nothing more human than the celebration of life that is expressed in music and dance. In it, I feel connected... connected to others, to God, and to all of creation. I no longer feel isolated and separated – the hard boundaries of my sense of "self" are softened – and I am better able to transcend them and breathe in the more expansive communion of creation. Dance is a celebration of life through our recognition of and rejoicing in the momentariness and finitude of created life. And in this acceptance of reality, we may momentarily transcend our human fragility and drink deeply from the waters of eternal life.

In our first lesson this morning, David has successfully united the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, and is now king of all Israel. He has established his capital in Jerusalem and he is bringing the Ark of the Covenant to be installed in Jerusalem, from where it had resided in the former northern kingdom. The Ark symbolized and represented God's real presence in Israel and was a link with Israel's tribal past, as well as a touch-stone to its future.

With much rejoicing, David accompanied the Ark on its procession into the City of David by dancing before the Lord with all his might. Wearing a priestly apron-like garment (and possibly only that), the King leaped and danced with joyous abandon before the Ark, to the sounds of music and singing, and jubilant shouts of the crowds. We understand from his wife Michal's derision, that in his fervor and great happiness he, at best, behaved in a very un-kingly way and, at worst, he exposed his nakedness before the crowds of his subjects.

Say what you will about propriety, I adore this story. I love the image of David dancing naked before the Ark. Of David giving himself fully and with complete abandon to his worship and joyous celebration of God's real and immediate presence among them. David stripped himself down to his essential self as created by God – divested and laid bare of all other layers of protection – all the accoutrements of kingship, societal position, and wealth. In this simple purity, David's response to God's holiness and blessing is to dance and rejoice, for the God of history and the God of creation is present. As the Psalmist exhorts us in Psalm 96, "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; dance before Him, all the earth."

In our Gospel lesson, we have another, perhaps more complicated, story about dance. In it, Herod's step-daughter dances for Herod and his friends. She so captivates them all with her dance that Herod is moved to offer her half of everything he has. Now, there has been much debate and speculation about this girl and her dance. Over the years, this story has been embellished with details not found in the text and has stirred up the outrage of many.

I personally think this poor girl has been objectified by a sexualized viewpoint over the millennia. Note that the text does not state that Herodias danced unclothed or provocatively. The text does not state that she danced the "Dance of the Seven Veils," nor does it state that Herod extended his generous offer because he was overcome with desire. Rather, I suggest (and others more expert than I argue) that instead, this was more likely just as it seems: a glorious and captivating dance by a favored child performed before an enchanted, delighted, and proud father. If we assume this scenario for today, we now see how this story of Herodias' delighting dance fits with David's exuberant dance before the Lord.

We should take courage and inspiration from David's and Herodias' dancing. Throughout human cultures, the act of creation itself is often envisioned as the eternal dance of the Creator. And I believe God calls us to join Him in that holy dance. This is why dance, whether of the human body or of the heart, may in fact be the best and most faithful response to the presence of God's holiness.

Most of you probably know the hymn, Lord of the Dance, written by English songwriter Sidney Carter. In this song, Christ is Lord of life who dances through all creation, calling us to new and eternal life in him. This may be one of my all-time favorite images for the Lord of Creation, and a few of the verses go like this:

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,  
And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,  
And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth,  
At Bethlehem I had my birth.

Dance, dance, wherever you may be  
I am the lord of the dance, said he  
And I lead you all, wherever you may be  
And I lead you all in the dance, said he.

I danced on a Friday when the world turned black  
It's hard to dance with the devil on your back  
They buried my body, they thought I was gone  
But I am the dance, and the dance goes on

They cut me down and I leapt up high  
I am the life that will never, never die  
I'll live in you if you'll live in me  
I am the Lord of the dance, said he.

So, for today and for the time being, I think that it is important for us to continue the dance. Shut the door, turn up whatever music lifts your heart and moves your body, and dance! Find the courage to dance with wild abandon, stripping yourself naked of all that separates you from others and God. Dance like David and Herodias and you will experience the truth that God is dancing with us.

Amen.