

## **DANCE LIKE NOBODY'S WATCHING!**

7/15/18 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Proper 10 (B): 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19; Psalm 24; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:14-29

Having just returned from 10 days at General Convention in Austin, Texas, I am tempted to just pretend I'm Michael Curry, and deliver some of the juicy tidbits he preached in our various worship services. The problem is I'd never be able to carry off his delivery style, the sermon would be way too long for all y'all (as we say in Texas), and as soon as I started talking about, "You know, that reminds me of an old hymn y'all must remember," it'd be pretty clear I was copying him.

For those of you not as familiar with The Episcopal Church, let me give you a quick run-down. Every three years, all the provinces of The Episcopal Church, which includes all the dioceses in the U.S. and a number in other countries such as Cuba, Haiti, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, get together to set policy.

Much like our U.S. government structure, there are two houses through which all resolutions must pass. It's a grueling, but fascinating, process as people speak for, or against, the various proposals, while others offer amendments.

Our current Presiding Bishop of the entire Episcopal Church is Michael Curry. The same Michael Curry who preached last month at the Royal Wedding. And if you haven't heard him preach, I recommend going home and looking-up one of his sermons online. He is amazing! In many ways, he sounds like a Pentecostal preacher; he almost always says, "I'm gonna' wrap this up in a minute," and then goes on for at least another ten minutes; and he talks about us being the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement.

Now, I'm not a very good source for old hymns, but today's readings do remind me of a song. It's a Country Western song that was popular a number of years ago called: "Dance Like Nobody's Watching" by Kathy Mattea. Maybe you've heard it; the chorus goes: "You have to sing like you don't need the money; love like you'll never get hurt; you gotta' dance like nobody's watching."

In both 2nd Samuel and Mark, some of the characters seem to be doing just that—dancing like nobody's watching. In David's case, the scriptures tell us he was dancing "with all his might"; he danced to give glory to God; it was a dance filled with joy, praise and thanksgiving, as they brought home the ark of the LORD. We can only imagine the music was loud and the dance was all-consuming.

The dancing in the Gospel reading is also situated in the midst of a celebration. This time, however, the celebration is a birthday party. Instead of giving glory to God, this is a performance designed strictly to please the birthday boy, who happens to be Herod.

The passage comes in the middle of people trying to figure out who Jesus is. They've been hearing stories of this guy who, like John the Baptist, is stirring things up—bucking the system, so to speak—and advocating a new way of being. And because Herod apparently feels guilty for having had John beheaded—after all, he's talked about how intrigued he is by John—when asked who he thinks Jesus is, Herod suggests, "Maybe it's John the Baptist raised from the dead", and then begins to tell this story of how he had John beheaded.

While the daughter of his wife dances for Herod and his guests, they simply watch—unlike David, Herod does not participate in the dancing. Yet, it does seem that the young woman “dances like nobody’s watching”. She dances so intensely, in fact, that she completely captivates Herod.

In this scenario, we have to imagine the lavishness that’s a king’s party would entail: tables full of food, the fanciest clothing, and plenty of fine wine. In Herod’s delight—and perhaps alcohol-induced poor judgment—he tells the girl he has enjoyed the dance so much that he will grant her anything she asks as a gesture of his gratitude.

At which point, this young woman seems to decide, if she can ask for anything she wants, she wants it to really count, so she runs to her mother for some advice. As it turns out, her mother—that is, Herod’s wife—is harboring some resentment. Apparently John the Baptist has been a thorn in her side—for one thing, he condemned the marriage between her and Herod, because her late husband was Herod’s brother—so she instructs her daughter to ask for John’s head on a platter.

Interestingly, the wife in 2nd Samuel is very similar—both she and Herod’s wife are filled with anger, and are both called upon to help establish a sense of loyalty. Herod kills John out of loyalty to his wife, and David calls on his wife, Michal, to establish his loyalty. In today’s segment of 2nd Samuel, we are only told that Michal despises David as she watches him dance, but if you’re familiar with the story, you might recall that she was the daughter of Saul, the king whom David has replaced.

And there was a long history behind Michal’s bitterness. Early on in the saga, Saul gives her to David as a way for him to keep tabs on David, but much to Saul’s chagrin, Michal falls for David and protects him from her father. So Saul takes her away and gives her to another man. Eventually she and her second husband are quite happy together.

By the time David instructs her to come back—and he only demands her return to prove his connection to Saul—she is, needless to say, a little ticked off. While this might seem like a strange turn of events to us, we have to remember that back in those days, loyalty was everything. So David demands that a wife he hasn’t seen in years return, and Herod, out of loyalty to his family, demands that John the Baptist be killed.

Even though, at first glance, there’s a sense that the dancing in these two stories is done like nobody’s watching, the truth is—and this is what was reiterated for me at General Convention—the truth is that while we should do the right thing, live into our discipleship...even though people might think we’re weird or strange to be so counter-cultural...that is dancing like nobody’s watching—we also have to be aware that there is almost certainly someone watching.

So when Bishop Curry preached at the Royal Wedding, he didn’t care that the British monarchy and their guests were rolling their eyes at his lack of what they consider, decorum. He literally dances like nobody’s watching as he bobs up and down and all around the pulpit. And, yet, he absolutely knew everyone would be watching. He knew the world would be watching that wedding, and that the world would know he represents The Episcopal Church. So he preached about the power of love as he often does.

At General Convention, Bishop Curry preached more about love. He explained that he's come to understand that the opposite of love isn't hate; the opposite of love is selfishness or self-centeredness. Love is not about going along with pre-existing boundaries that determine who is deserving of our loyalty. Love does not limit the inclusivity of God's kingdom in any way. Love has us dancing like nobody's watching, and, yet, knowing everybody's watching.

The other thing that occurs to me in these two biblical stories is that most of us would rather look away. We don't want to hear about the dysfunctional relationships of the mighty King David! We don't want to watch a dead man's head be paraded around on a platter! We want to hear about things that are beautiful—things that inspire us. But if we're not willing to look at the messy, complicated, troubling parts of the world around us, we can't help. And as followers of Christ, we have been called to help!

Being at the Episcopal Convention with about 2,000 of our fellow siblings in Christ (and I am purposely saying "siblings in Christ" because I learned that among our transgendered siblings, there are those who consider themselves non-binary—that is neither male nor female—so when we say "brothers and sisters in Christ" they feel left out); being at the Episcopal Convention with all these people gave us all lots of opportunity to not look away.

We heard testimonies from both clergy and laity who had been sexually abused or assaulted in church settings; some of the deputies and bishops visited an immigration detention center in Taylor, Texas, where all they could see were the hands of women waving in the windows at the tops of the walls; we listened as our neighbors who come from war-torn countries begged us to stand in solidarity with them. These are things that we would all rather not look at.

But because we are the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement, we must remember that our loyalty is due only to God, and in that sense of loyalty, we are called to act in ways—to make decisions—in ways that make God proud. In ways that might look to the rest of the world like we're all a little bit crazy—like nobody's watching—and yet in ways that we are aware...everybody's watching.

You know what? This does remind me of a hymn. I'm sure all y'all remember: "They'll know we are Christians by our love...by our love; yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love!"

—Amen

### **Collect of the Day:**

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## **2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19**

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

They brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the LORD. When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts, and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

## **Psalm 24**

- 1 The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, \*  
the world and all who dwell therein.
- 2 For it is he who founded it upon the seas \*  
and made it firm upon the rivers of the deep.
- 3 "Who can ascend the hill of the LORD? " \*  
and who can stand in his holy place?"
- 4 "Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, \*  
who have not pledged themselves to falsehood,  
nor sworn by what is a fraud.
- 5 They shall receive a blessing from the LORD \*  
and a just reward from the God of their salvation."
- 6 Such is the generation of those who seek him, \*  
of those who seek your face, O God of Jacob.

7 Lift up your heads, O gates;  
lift them high, O everlasting doors; \*  
and the King of glory shall come in.

8 "Who is this King of glory?" \*  
"The LORD, strong and mighty,  
the LORD, mighty in battle."

9 Lift up your heads, O gates;  
lift them high, O everlasting doors; \*  
and the King of glory shall come in.

10 "Who is he, this King of glory?"  
"The LORD of hosts,  
he is the King of glory."

### **Ephesians 1:3-14**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

**Mark 6:14-29**

King Herod heard of the demons cast out and the many who were anointed and cured, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.