

July 11, 2021

“Let’s Dance”

Scripture Readings

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 14-15

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, ... they 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.

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.

Sermon

“Let’s Dance”

If you ever want to read a weird story, I urge you to look up the ark of the covenant on Wikipedia. It’s a trip. The Ark was supposedly built to house the 10 commandments. It changes hands several times through war, it brings great catastrophe and pestilence to those who steal it and if you touch it then you may keel over dead.

So what’s interesting is that it houses the ten commandments yet men did everything they could; like lying, stealing, coveting, and murder in order to possess it. The point being is that it wasn’t about following the 10 commandments but it was about being the one with all the power.

Nonetheless, David is so joyful when the ark finally returns to him he breaks into dancing and celebrating in front of everyone. On the surface of this story we see King David just being joyful after a great victory, he finally got what he wanted! The presence of the Lord, that the ark represented, was with him now. So of course he should dance. We should all dance.

But the story doesn't stop there, and if you're not careful you will miss this little detail about the woman Michal (mee-CHAL), standing in the window, seeing her husband leaping and dancing and the scripture says she despises him in her heart.

If we were to just stop there we could draw all kinds of conclusions. That she was just a bitter and mean woman, that she is jealous because David is getting all the attention or that she's judging him for being childish. But, one of the first things we learned in our pastoral care classes is that there is always more to the story, that our lives are complicated by the things we do and the things done to us.

To just look at the bitter woman in the window you wouldn't know what had happened to her to make her bitter. The lectionary often cuts up our scriptures in a way that doesn't tell the whole story in order to not bore the heck out of you on Sunday mornings. We still won't get the whole story about her from reading the scriptures but there are things that we do know. Women were property during the writing of this scripture. Michal had originally loved David and he her, he went to war and killed two hundred Philistines in order to win her hand in marriage from her father King Saul.

We know they lived happily until King Saul started losing his mind and thought David was going to try and kill him and take his crown. It was Michal that helped him escape, saving his life, but in order to do that he had to leave his wife for years.

Then Saul forces his daughter to marry another man, an exchange of property again. We have no idea how she felt about this. Then when David comes to power and King Saul is dead he sends for her and insists after years she return to him. But this time not out of love, it's because the now-full-of-himself-David, wanted his property back and he wanted the prestige of being married to the former King's daughter. We have no idea how she felt about this either. We do know her other husband at the time trailed behind her weeping all the way, so we know she was at least loved.

By this time David had several concubines and he chose the younger concubines, beautiful slave girls and many other women over her. He kept her tucked away and no longer found her attractive leaving her without kids and without the comfort she could draw from another man.

But... according to most commentaries, she was the one with the problem, she was the one who couldn't get out of her bitterness long enough to celebrate her husband's success. The ultimate humiliation for Michal was when David had Bathsheba's husband sent to the front lines where he was killed so he could have her as one of his wives.

I think I would have some feelings about David Dancing in the streets celebrating the return of the ten commandments when I knew that adultery and coveting a neighbor's wife were under the list of "thou shalt nots" contained within the very arc he was dancing in front of.

I guess my point is that for centuries from the Patriarchal lens we have read the bible from, a lens often crafted by the scriptures themselves. We have held King David up as the hero, God's anointed one, the one who killed the Giant with the sling as a young boy. The tender hearted poet that wrote many of the Psalms. He did do some pretty awesome things, but do we give him a pass on all the things he did? What about Michal? She gets left back in that book as the bitter and barren woman who dies alone and unloved.

Switching gears, this is why Jesus's admonition to not judge one another is so important. We don't know the back story on people we encounter every day, we don't know what they are going through, what they have been through, what's been done to them. We don't know what has caused them to be the people they are.

I try (try being so the operative word) I try to remember this when I am dealing with mean or nasty people. I try and look past the exterior of rude with compassion to see their deeper feelings, their fear, insecurity, their pain, their loss of hope and gain of mistrust. I try and see their grief over life not turning out the way they thought it would.

People like that are still loved by God. People like that still deserve to be loved by us. I have countless stories from my work as a hospital chaplain where when I first walk into a patient's room what I encounter is rage, or nastiness and rudeness, but all it takes is saying something like, "Whew, I can't imagine what you are going through" or "Man, this has to be so hard" and the flood gates open, all that sideways emotion that was coming out as mean finally finds its true form of grief.

Loving one another, truly loving one another means that we try and listen not with our ears but with our hearts. It means we don't just pass someone over because they are grumpy, because they aren't celebrating or dancing in the streets.

I wonder if Michal ever thought, when she was in that honeymoon stage of her marriage with David, if she would end up alone and hostage in his home. I doubt it. She deserves for us to remember her as the wife that loved David so much she risked her life for him. She deserves for us to take a closer look. Just like people in our lives deserve for us to take a closer look and we

deserve to mess up sometimes, to have a bad day, to snap at a friend, and not be written off as bitter and envious.

For this is the true dance of life, to celebrate the highs but to also love each other through the lows, through our bitter moments, through those times in our lives we feel trapped and sad. Of course there is more to this dance. There is apology when we do mess up, there is forgiveness when someone else does and there are boundaries we need to have when they become a threat to our own well being but there is also grace.

To give people the God given space they need to find the emotions that are behind their behaviors. Practice that this week. When someone is snarky at the store, when someone tailgates you, when a friend or partner is down, try and see beyond their behavior, try to think, they may be like Michal and have a very good reason for feeling what they're feeling. AMEN

Copyright 2021 Susan Drake
All Rights Reserved

