

July 15, 2018
Columbia Congregational Church
2 Samuel 6: 1-5, 12b-19
“God Inspired Joy”

I love this story of King David dancing wildly, dancing for joy, rejoicing in God’s presence and everyone forming a parade and joining that enthusiasm.

The other day I was in Stop and Shop waiting my turn at the deli counter. On the piped music was a Dave Clark 5 song “Glad All Over”. Well, I was a fan of the Dave Clark 5, a part of the British Invasion of the 60s, and I remembered singing that song in the car and in my room and with my friends. I chuckled to myself as I wondered what would happen if I started singing and dancing, demonstrating I was feeling “Glad All Over.” Would others join in, would everyone waiting at the deli counter start singing and dancing because they were “Glad all Over” or would they take a few steps away from my untamed behavior, hoping I would soon leave?

The truth is music and rhythm make me want to cast aside my inhibitions and dance....or at least move with the music. Yet I am very aware I am no Ginger Rogers or Misty Copeland, principal dancer at the American Ballet Theatre, or even Olivia Newton John, whose major talent is singing but danced in the musical film *Grease*.

It would seem from our reading this morning that David’s dance was less than trained and elegant. However, it was a great show of joy in bringing the Ark of the Covenant – God’s Presence into the city of Jerusalem. Scripture tells us that David’s wife Michal was less than

impressed. In fact she looked upon him with contempt for making such a vulgar spectacle of himself, dancing like a “burlesque street dancer.”¹ It was hardly the behavior for a King. But David didn’t care because he was filled with joy to be in God’s presence. In David’s leaping and spinning, he revealed with his face, legs, arms and body the immense joy he felt to know and be in the presence of God.

The God of the Israelites was the One so sacred and “other” that they dared not speak aloud God’s name because it was so profoundly holy. While the Holy One was view in awe and with reverence, they not only sang praises to God but also laments and urged one another toward faith. They expressed certainty and longing, fear and faith, punished and saved. They were fully involved in their relationship with God.

Have we made God a mister-nice-guy, kind and forgiving, someone who is simply a friendly companion who comforts us and rewards us when we do right? I wonder if that God could possibly be powerful enough to bring order out of chaos, to be victor over evil. It might do us well to see God as an awesome “other”, to stand in awe, even fear, of God’s transcendent power and glory which we cannot measure and cannot even imagine. And then we can sing praise, make music , express joy.

David was not a solo dancer, nor did he have just one partner. All the house of Israel was caught up with this enthusiastic response to bringing the Ark of the Covenant, bringing God’s Holy Presence into the City of David, into Jerusalem. They were dancing with all their might with shouts and songs, with lyre and harps and tambourines and trumpet. What a procession! Did they all know and play the same songs or did they all play

¹ Eugene Peterson, *The Message*.

wildly making a cacophonous jubilation? These dancers too were bursting with enthusiasm. Interestingly, the word *enthusiastic* originally meant “in God” (*en theos*, in God). David’s wild dancing was in God. I wonder again if we haven’t made God into such a milk toast Being that our response to God’s presence in our lives is equally bland.

I am not suggesting here that we should start wildly dancing in church. But we have talked about trying some new things in our worship, in our mission and in our fellowship. We may need to let go of the way we have always done it, and loosen up a little, reveal the joy we feel because of God’s active presence in our lives.

When I was growing up in Willow Grove Presbyterian Church, we all entered church and followed the rules of worship: standing and sitting at the appropriate times, reciting the Apostle’s Creed, sitting quietly during the anthem, putting our offering in the plates when they came around. We sat in our pews and we were served. There was no “passing of the peace.” I was very uncomfortable when I first experienced that in the Congregational Church of my grandparents. Today, I can’t imagine worship without it.

At Seminary, worship included clapping and arm waving to some hymns, lifting our hands to God in prayer, and from time to time someone would call out “Alleluia “ and “Praise the Lord” and we would all say Amen together. I grew more comfortable with some of these, but what stood out for me was the sense that we were all worshipping together. It was not just a response to the worship leader. Together, we were rejoicing in the knowledge of God’s presence in our lives.

How do we get to the “deep-down-in -the –heart jubilation over what God is doing in our lives?”² We may get that way when our team wins the World cup or the Super Bowl or March Madness but can we feel that when we think of God? I have found a daily practice of listing gratitudes pushes that joy ahead of the negative struggles in life.

We might ask ourselves, is our life God-centered or human-centered? When we dance as a church, that is, when we celebrate everyone’s use of their gifts and talents to up-build the community of God, when we look at our mission and worship and stewardship, do we see God in action, are we filled with uncontainable joy of having God with us? Or are we here out of duty? Irenaeus wrote, “The glory of God is the human person fully alive.” What does that mean to e fully alive in worship.

Joyous dancing is contagious. Is our dance – our response to God’s presence in our lives - so filled with enthusiasm, so filled with God that others can’t help but want to join in? For sure, some will scratch their heads at our joyous and hopeful attitude during these troubling times for our churches, our nation and our world. Others may look on us with disgust as we express what they would consider our ridiculous confidence in God. But some will see this hope, this confidence and this peace as something they want to experience too. Let us dance before the Lord with enthusiasm, welcoming any who want to rejoice in God’s presence along with us.

Amen

Holy One, cause us to dance with grace, courage, and freedom available through Jesus Christ. Amen.

² Kathryn Matthews Huey, UCC Weekly Seeds, July 15, 2012

