

Rev. Julie Songer Belman
Bethel UMC - July 22, 2018

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

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. ²David 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. ³They 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 ⁴with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. ⁵David 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. ¹²It was told King David, “The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God.” So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; ¹³and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. ¹⁴David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. ¹⁵So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. ¹⁶As 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. ¹⁷They 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. ¹⁸When 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, ¹⁹and 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.

To Dance and to Leap

As I studied the text this week with this story of David leaping and dancing, I found myself thinking about three questions in my own life and I would like, in turn, to ask you to think about the same questions this morning. The first question is this: What in your life has caused you, literally or metaphorically, to leap and to dance?

I asked this question on social media last week. My friend Emily said falling in love. “I could have danced all night,” she said, “and still have danced some more.” Another friend commented it was being with her children at the beach, when they could leap into the waves and play in the sand, and just be who they were without having to worry about what people might think or say.

Travis will tell you that I dance all the time.

- I am often found twirling a baby around the den while singing a Broadway showtune,
- Or practicing an old tap routine under our dining room table during dinner,
- Or swishing my hair and bouncing in my seat when a good song comes on the XM radio in our car.
- For me, amazing music inspires soulful movement.

For David it was bringing the ark of God to Jerusalem. It made him want to leap and dance. At first, David's bringing the ark of God into Jerusalem might seem quite different from falling in love or being able to play with your children at the beach. They might seem like very different things. . . . but I wonder if they are?

The Ark of the Covenant had been part of Israel's history since the time of Sinai. It was a sign of God's presence with the people of Israel – a sign of who Israel was as God's chosen people: called by God to be a blessing to all the world.

- The ark had gone with the Israelites through their 40 years in the wilderness.
- The ark had led the way when the children of Israel had passed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land.
- Once they arrived, the ark had been cared for by the priest Eli and by Eli's disciple, Samuel.

Then it was captured by Israel's enemies, the Philistines, who kept it for a while, but eventually decided it was bad luck, so they sent it back to Israel. But the new king, the first king of Israel, King Saul, was not interested in the Ark. And so it was discarded, tossed to the side for the 20 years of King Saul's rule. It just sat in Abinadab's back yard for decades, uncared for and unattended until Saul died and David became king.

King David commissioned a group of people to retrieve the Ark of God, the Ark of the Covenant, from where it was just sitting, uncared for. David rescued the Ark from its back yard abandonment, and brought to the capital city of Jerusalem. And as the Ark was coming into the city, David began to dance, to leap, to celebrate. Because David had fallen in love with God.

David reclaimed Israel's identity and heritage as the children of God, as God's chosen ones. He restored a part of Israel that had been lost and forgotten during Saul's kingship. He made Israel whole again and it made him want to dance and to leap. David danced before the Ark, reckless and joyful. In fact, the Bible tells us he practically danced his clothes off!

Why did he dance? I think it is because David was the kind of person who responded with his heart. He was not the kind to be calculating, or overly concerned with being politically correct, or even the proper protocol for a king. He responded from his heart.

And isn't this what happens to us when we truly fall in love? A part of us that is lost within ourselves is found. Our brokenness is healed and we are made whole. Isn't this what happens to us when we feel safe enough to take the risk of just being who we are? We become whole. We are reunited with that part of ourselves that is lost or abandoned, and it wants to make us dance and leap.

So the first question is when in your life have you wanted to dance and to leap? I want to suggest that whenever that was, it was when you were most whole, when you were most *you*. A lot of us pay a lot of attention to problems in our life, but when are we paying attention to the joy in our life? When have you wanted dance and leap for joy?

Here is my second question: When have you been resentful of someone else's joy? When have you, like Michal, the daughter of Saul, who looked out the window and saw David dancing and *despised* him, when have you felt resentful of someone else's dancing?

Paul Tillich, about 60 years ago, preached a famous sermon entitled "You are Accepted."¹ He said something in that sermon that has stuck in my mind from the day I read it in seminary. He says all of us, all of humanity, exist in a state of separation from self, others and God. He was talking about us existing in a state of "sin." The word "sin," Tillich says, should never be used in the plural. Sin is not the wrong or immoral things that we do, but sin is the condition in which we exist, that causes us to do harmful things to our own self, to one another and to God. We exist in a state of separation and sin.

One of the evidences that he gives for this is: "*There is something in the misfortune of our best friends which does not displease us.*" This is evidence that we are alienated from each other, from God and from our own selves. There is something in the misfortune of even our best friends that does not displease us.

There is a word for this in German: the word is *schadenfreude* which means "happiness at the misfortune of others."²

¹ Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 157.

² Avenue Q lyrics

Now, I admit I did not learn this word in seminary, or in a classical language class in college. I learned this word in New York City. There is an entire song about it in the Broadway musical Avenue Q. Schadenfreude – when we take pleasure in the misfortunes of others.

Now, I know several of you take notes on my sermons, writing down things that inspire you or challenge you or that you want to find out more about later. So I'm issuing a warning – don't go home and google Avenue Q song lyrics. It's not a "G Rated" show. ☺

But some of cleaner examples this song sings are:

- Don't you feel all warm and cozy, watching people out in the rain? That's Schadenfreude -- people taking pleasure in your pain.
- Watching a vegetarian find out she just ate chicken... Football players getting tackled, CEO's getting shakled, watching actors never reach the ending of their Oscars speech!
- This is schadenfreude.

And what our Scripture text today says is a twist on schadenfreude, when we find *displeasure* in the joys of others. The joys of others make us resentful.

When have you felt resentful of someone else's joy, someone else's success, someone else's achievements? When have you been unhappy because someone else was praised or rewarded? I'm willing to bet many can relate to this, and I think it has to do with the lack of joy in our own lives.... Because if we had joy in our own lives it would make us happy to see others living out their lives with joy and fulfillment and happiness, right!?! It challenges me to think that much of the harm that we do to one another is a consequence of lack of joy in our own lives. It is part of the reason that people become racist, or sexist, or homophobic, or look down on those who are different, including people who are differently abled.

When have we been resentful of someone else's joy?

The third and final question: What is keeping you from dancing and leaping today? Today, July 22, 2018, what is the *one* thing that would cause you to dance with all your might? What is the one thing that would cause you to leap from your pew and dance down the aisle causing your fellow church members to wonder, 'what in heaven's name has gotten into him?' Whatever that one thing might be, my guess is that it would reveal where you have found the Presence of God.

It is in finding God's Presence that any of us has a reason for dancing with all our might!

This may be the strongest argument I can make for incorporating Liturgical Dance in worship. Perhaps that was the purpose John Califf had in mind when he designed our beautiful sanctuary with that long center aisle and great open space down front? Plenty good room for folks to worship God with all their might! Can you imagine yourself dancing to reveal God's presence in your life?! Imagine dancing into the church this morning, carrying the Ark of the Covenant, and being the one responsible for embodying the sacred!

What is getting in the way of your joy?

When my Grandmother and I visited Rome a few years ago, we went to see the Museum of Jewish History and the synagogue of Rome. From the mid-16th century until around 1900, the Roman Jews were forced to live in the ghettos of Rome, and at night they had to be inside the walls, behind locked gates. It was the only place where they were allowed to be. Then in 1901, walls were torn down and the museum and synagogue were built.

In the gift shop of the museum I bought a postcard of a painting showing the Roman Jews celebrating the holiday *simhat torah*. In the picture you see them leaping and twirling on the lawn of the synagogue, celebrating. The rabbi is in the midst of them dancing with the scrolls of the Torah.

Christian theologian Harvey Cox has been attending synagogue for several years with his Jewish wife. He says that *simhat torah* is one of the Jewish holidays that he loves the most. They attend an old synagogue in Boston, and he says that when *simhat torah* arrives, the street outside the synagogue becomes jammed with hundreds of people whirling and leaping to the beat of blaring music. "On this night," he writes, "Jews dance with the Torah – sometimes into the wee hours of the night — in near euphoria, thanking God for the gift of His Word [*Torah*.]"³

If we could get over the things in our daily life that distract us from the JOY of living,

- If we could really pay attention to the story the Bible is telling,
- The real joy of the biblical story,
- We too could spill out onto Forest Drive and dance with our Bibles.

My friends, hear the Good News: the Bible is the story of a God who has fallen in love with us, and who would like us to fall in love with God. It is the story of a God who completes us and makes us whole. A God who knows us as we are and loves us still. A

³ Harvey Cox, "Gamboling with God" in *Best Spiritual Writing 2002*, edited by Philip Zaleski (HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 27-40.

God who wants nothing more for us than that we would come to love ourselves and each other. The Bible is a story where all of the brokenness, pain, and emptiness of the universe is healed, reconciled and made whole.

What in your life has made you want to dance and to leap?

When do you find yourself resentful of the joy of others?

What today is getting in the way of your joy?

My friends, what do we need to surrender to the grace of God to just let joy happen?

LET US PRAY: Loving, Powerful God, may the JOY we find in you fill our souls this day. Open our hearts and our spirits to receive fully the joy which has been given for us! Let us celebrate the victory of Christ and the hope for the future! Amen.