

## Time To Dance

2 Samuel 6: 1-5, 12b-19 (text courtesy Vanderbilt Divinity Library)

6:1 David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand.

6:2 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.

6:3 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

6:4 with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark.

6:5 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.

6:12b So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing;

6:13 and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fattling.

6:14 David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod.

6:15 So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

6:16 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.

6:17 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.

6:18 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,

6:19 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.

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When I was a little girl growing up, my parents had all kinds of inspirational plaques hanging on the wall. You know the ones . . . like the man sitting under the tree looking at the bird perched above saying, "Go ahead everyone else does" . . . "God grant me patience, But I want it now!" . . . And, "If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?"

Well, it is no surprise that one plaque got my attention because it was different from the others. It was the Optimist Creed, written by Christian D. Larson. 10 "Promises to yourself" that make up the creed for the international group called, Optimist International. It's hanging in my office if anyone wants to read it.

I used to read it as a child and find myself stumbling each time on the one that says, "Promise yourself to be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own." Yeah, well, mayyybe . . . maybe for someone I liked a lot - but not for the people I didn't like! And even then I found myself jealous of my best friends and siblings when they would achieve something. I was the youngest of 4 in a very competitive family . . . a society where it is dog eat dog, snooze you lose, move your feet lose your seat, survival of the fastest and meanest . . . in this environment, how was I supposed to be happy for others? Wasn't that a luxury I couldn't afford? In fact, I don't think I would have thought there was anything wrong with my feelings if I hadn't read that plaque, and church. It was too clear cut and to the point.

It is hard to be happy for others' success if you see life as a power struggle and you are losing.

We see some rather extreme cases of this in our scriptures for today. The Gospel was the worst offender. I mean, what a party pooper, here they are dancing and drinking and having a good time,

celebrating Herod's Birthday, and the daughter of Herodias not only brings politics into the mix, but the head of John the Baptist itself!

That is one of the strangest things about scripture and ancient history, often times we hear about this stuff and it doesn't seem to shock us. As though things like this happened all the time and no one in that time must have thought anything about it. It was just one of those bizarre power plays during a less 'just' period of history, one brief, rare moment when a woman could take power for herself, albeit cruelly and have an innocent person executed. Things like that don't happen today.

And the scripture is extremely generous to Herod. Both versions, in Mark and in Matthew say the King was sorry, he didn't really want to behead John, but gave his word, *in front of company* (no less!), his hands were tied, he couldn't do anything about it, what a shame . . . an innocent man gets killed because he spoke a truth that powerful people didn't like . . . and some people mourned John the Baptist, but not much else happened. No big deal.

It is hard to be happy for others' success if you see life as a power struggle and you are losing. And in our Lesson for the day, Michal, daughter of the former King Saul, one of David's wives, "despises David in her heart" for dancing before the Lord. This is truly a great day for her husband . . . for the country . . . for Israelites! The Ark, the holiest of holies, has been brought into the sacred city, the seat of earthly power for God's people. It was almost as if God himself was brought into Washington DC and given a place to stay forever. What's not to be happy?

There are all kinds of possible reasons why she may not have been happy. She may have been missing her husband Paltiel, whom she was torn away from; or maybe she wasn't pleased that as a former princess she was only one of many wives of David; or maybe she resented the fact that her family's fortunes were dwindling away. But the fact is that it was recorded for history that she was an official party pooper, too. At least she didn't have anyone killed for it, but she does end up barren and dying without any heirs.

It is hard to be happy for others' success if you see life as a power struggle and you are losing. And it is hard to know when to rejoice. One person's sense of righteousness can be seen by others as good things happening to bad people, which happens as well, and can cause us to be unsure of whether or not we should be rejoicing.

How do we know what is truly just? How can we guard against our inner 'Brat' blinding us to those moments when we really should be dancing for pure joy and not for power? Are humans truly capable of *seeing* those moments in ourselves when we should be rejoicing in the success of others? And if so, how can we get to the place where our sense of joy is real and not just placed there because we know we should?

Well, let us begin by thinking of life as something other than a game, a power struggle, an achievement ladder. Much of our sense of competition and power struggles come from the idea that we *have to* compare ourselves with others in order to know what *we* need to do and where we need to grow. We do this because we are afraid. We are afraid to know information too late to take advantage of *it*, afraid that we may lose at something and expose ourselves as *weaklings* that *can be taken advantage of*. We are afraid that if we fail, we could be penniless, homeless, and friendless.

We can change our jealousies and our way of living life if we change our priorities. When we take out the fear and replace it with a sense of relating to God on a unique person to person basis, trusting God to help us become who we truly are, that is when we begin to be optimistic about ourselves in the

world. That is when we realize that we can be happy about the success of others because they aren't in competition with us. They are working on their uniqueness, as are we.

The ninth 'Promise Yourself' reads, "Promise yourself to give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others." In other words, judge not least ye be judged, take the log out of your own eye . . . or just get busy on your relationship with God and you will begin to see God in everyone and grow mercy in your heart.

This process of working with God on creating our own unique, best selves sounds a bit self-centered. But when we are working to have God in our hearts and minds, where he can help in our development and decision making process, that is when we are truly united with the best interests of the whole of God's creation. We are becoming creative beings along with the evolution of the rest of the world, in the best interest of the world.

From the Epistle reading (Eph. 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 before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love . . . With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will . . . as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth . . ."

As a pastor I am often asked about the End times and if I believe we are in them. And I think, how can we be in the end? When we who are in Christ, in the fullness of time, in the process of creating a just and loving universe - - we are full of his glory, we can be full of optimism and we can dance - because God *is* in us. We have been told to have no fear, and by God we shall not! God's Ark of the Covenant is Jesus Christ and he is in our hearts. We don't need a temple in DC, because we have the promise in our souls!