

Let us pray:

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

-BCP p. 815

As many of you know, I've spent a lot of time this past week thinking about dancing: Edgar Degas' ballerinas, Jules Pfeiffer's Martha Graham figure modern dancing her way through life, the Africans at my Oakland church who couldn't give a party without dancing, our California native tribes who renewed themselves and their relationship to the earth with their dances, King Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther who ordered his queen Vashti to dance before his drinking buddies, and today's Old Testament and Gospel which are both in various ways, dance parties. We dance when we're happy, our first school dance in sixth grade is an initiation ritual (and very embarrassing as many initiations are), we dance to celebrate that we have safely crossed the Red Sea. Couples take ballroom dancing classes to prepare for their weddings. We dance to work off steam. We dance to impress. We dance to laugh and celebrate. Like cranes we do courtship dances. In a very real way, dance embraces and expresses all the feelings and emotions of life in the embodied world, from the highest rapture to the lowest rage, without having to say a word.

The story of Herod's banquet and the head of John the Baptist on the platter is a well-known dancing story, a story of corruption and duplicity. Less famous, but perhaps more revealing, is the account in 2 Samuel of David's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, dancing at the

head of the Arc of the Covenant. Bringing the Ark to its new home had been a long, and sometimes scary journey, but at last, it is done, and David is now fully a king in his own capital. He made it! He leaps for joy. Looking out her window, Saul's daughter Michal, who was, at one time, David's first and only wife, despises him. David offers sacrifices and distributes generous portions of food to all who have assembled, both men and women. Then all the people go back to their homes and that's the end of the story.

Except it isn't the end of the story. This is one of the places where the Lectionary closes too soon. If the story really did end where our reading did, David would still be pure benevolence, like Jesus, feeding a multitude, like Jesus, rejoicing before the Lord. Today's David is still flush with goodness, sharing his joy; the bad stuff, starting with the very next paragraph, is yet to come.

As I've said, one of the things I'm doing this year is delving into the relationship between David's story and Jesus' story, how Jesus, as a heavenly king, fulfills David's story as his people's most beloved earthly king. It's an election year. Candidates need to know they are loved. Mass rallies play on people's emotions. They dare us to act out.

We've seen how deeply the Israelites loved David. King Saul's son Jonathan and younger daughter Michal loved David. The people of Jerusalem, as we see in today's reading, love David. David thinks he understands the power of love. His armies win because they love him. He did the honorable thing, to praise and bury Saul. How could someone surrounded by so much love ever go wrong? But I repeat the question I asked two Sundays ago: if people loved David, does that mean he loved them back? Or were they merely accessories in his rise to power?

Now pause for a moment and think about Jesus.

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Nothing in this life, not even love, maybe especially love, is easy. Love typically arises from an empty place within. Love is typically born of desire. Desire, that sense that something is missing, is one of the most difficult emotions with which we as humans must deal. Advertisers know this. Politicians know this. Raging hormones know this.

Religious practices: prayers, rules of life, the Ignatian self-examination, silent meditation, spiritual communities all help us to deal with and understand our feelings and emotions. We are neither to suppress them nor let them all hang out. In her book *The Jesus Way: Practicing the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises*, spiritual director Karen Keen writes: “The spiritual life is not advanced by holding all feelings in suspicion; Bringing our emotions and desires into the light allows us to discern what they are telling us...Once we notice them, it's important to hold them in the light and ask, what is each emotion telling me?...How is it influencing me? Emotions and desires are closely related to the Ignatian concepts of “consolation” and “desolation.” Consolation is any movement toward what is life-giving and indicative of God's spirit. Desolation is any movement away from God and toward destructive outcomes.

How can we know? What should we look for? Let's return to David. Wearing nothing but a loincloth, he bares himself and his soul to God. He leaps. Again this androgynous side to him, for typically in Israel, it was women who did the dancing. In his ecstasy, he feels nothing but benevolent.

And then we turn the page. Full of himself, David returns to bless his household.

Surely I am good! Flush with a triumphant return, stoked with generosity, David comes home.

Michal the daughter of Saul is not pleased. When she comes out to meet her former husband, she says, ‘How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants’ maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!’

You’ll note that Michal is not called “David’s wife” in this passage but “Saul’s daughter,” distancing her, making her part of the defeated past, and indeed, Saul took her away from David after she helped him escape her father’s palace and gave her to a man named Paltiel, who loved her very much, but had to give her back.

Continuing with our story, David says to Michal, ‘It was before the Lord, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord, that I have danced before the Lord. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in my own eyes; but by the maids of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor.’ And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

This is a prophetic moment. David, indeed, will go on to be abased, but he will always have women. During the years he was in exile, battling Saul, David acquired six new wives. A week from next Sunday, he will acquire yet another, his eighth, and most famous of all, Bathsheba. The sons and daughters of these marriages will succumb to their own passions (after all, that’s what Dad did), and fight bitterly. In two generations, the House of David will fall and Israel and Judah will split into two nations, never to be reunited.

A king, a president, a leader, sets an emotional tone for the people who follow.

I think it fair to ask with Michal, even if I cannot answer: Was David’s wild dance fitting behavior for a king?

This was what I was writing when one more gun rang out at a crowded and emotionally charged, rally.

It should not have come as a surprise. We've reached a point of such incoherence that many express themselves, not in words, music, or dance, but with guns. Yesterday's shot may have been heard around the world, but it may only be a confirmation of the fact that we are already at war, a war of hearts, minds, random shootings, and fear. Yesterday, a woman very close to me in age yelled at me about getting rid of "gerontocracy." Her self-righteous self-loathing of the old was palpable. I told her that I was an elder activist. I was very angry and not especially proud of myself.

Jesus came to teach us that you can't change structures of power without yourself becoming the power you are trying to overthrow. Jesus came to change people, not governments. He refused Satan's offer to give him authority over all the nations in the world. Looking at the beautifully scripted photographs of a bleeding former president, his fist raised high, his mouth set in teeth clenched defiance, a draft dodger calling people to fight, I found myself walking the stations of the cross. I saw Jesus silent before Pilate.

Can holy silence win an election?

Power is made perfect in weakness.

True love is not about self-gratification. It is about self-transformation. It is not, as James and John discovered, hanging out with the right person to secure the best seat in the Kingdom of God. It is, as Mary Magdalene lived it, the living out of gratitude. Jesus walked with Mary through the dark night of her rage. He understood. As she opened herself to him, he opened himself to her. And in the mature love of two transparent, realized souls, they found what matters most in the world.

As together, so will we.

Let us pray:

O God, the Father of all, whose Son commanded us to love our enemies: Lead them and us from prejudice to truth; deliver them and us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge; and in your good time enable us all to stand reconciled before you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.