

Dancing With the Choir
Seventh Sunday After Pentecost
July 12, 2015
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Text: 2 Samuel 6

If this sermon did have a title, perhaps it would be “Preaching to the Choir” – which you can’t always do in the summer! - or perhaps it would be “Dancing With the Choir!” – which may be more than they bargained for today. We’ll see about the dancing part - but in either case it’s not really JUST for the choir, but ‘Preaching to the Choir’ in that sense of saying something I know you’re already in favor of. I want to say something about the goodness of worship – about the power and beauty of praising God in worship – and since you’re here for a worship service (and other people aren’t!), I can count on you being a pretty receptive crowd for that theme. It’s like the stereotype I’ve heard of churches that have a Sunday evening service – the 2nd worship service of the day – with sermons criticizing those who only went to church once on Sunday! – a theme the 2nd-service attendees were always pleased to hear. So I’ve been thinking all week of how to say something about worship - which is both a very personal experience and a corporate experience that we share – to speak about worship in a way that isn’t just patting myself on the back or distinguishing “us” from others. And in particular I’ve been thinking about the passion of worship -even the EMOTION of worship, and how to talk about that. Passion and emotion at Hope Church? – shocking – maybe I’ve already lost the choir or some of you with such crazy talk...

The scripture passage that got me thinking about all this is the wild story in 2 Samuel of King David leaping and dancing before the LORD – and he is doing so with the choir:

David and all of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

David is at the forefront – and his wardrobe is of the ‘less is more’ variety: King David in a loincloth leaping and dancing, worshipping God with his whole being. And – there is Michal – she sees all this happening, and she despises David – he is an embarrassment. Now there is a whole wild mix of other details in this story which I cannot unwind today – but at the heart is this story of a person immersed in the passion of worship and a person who despises that expression of worship.

And what I want to say is that I relate strongly to both of those persons in this story – both to David the dancer and to Michal the despiser – and perhaps saying that I can relate to them seems a bit of a stretch. I mean, let's be real – this charismatic outburst of David is not my style – I can't remember ever leaping and dancing in worship (and I assure you that the loincloth wardrobe is not being considered!). The liturgical tradition in which I was raised and in which Hope Church stands, is much more characterized as the “frozen chosen” – and I can understand why people say that. But my experience of worship is that it is a time in which I find great passion, emotion, joy, tenderness, energy – not always, maybe often or just sometimes, but certainly so. I don't know if that's more as I get older, or if I am just more aware, a sliver of wisdom: but I do find myself struck by the profound joy of worshipping my God, of the deep meaning in giving thanks to God, of the deep need to reach out to God. Last week as the congregation sang ‘Amazing Grace’ it was deeply beautiful – passionate – worship. You may think it's a stretch to compare that to David, but it's my sermon, so I can: I'm simply saying I am in touch in deepening ways with the power and passion of worship, and I want to be able to express that and not be so concerned with what people think of it.

People like me – who are so judgmental – especially when it comes to worship. Lord have mercy, I can relate to Michal – looking out that window, despising David; it's often the overtly emotional kind of worship that I can be so critical of. “Despise” is a strong word, and I confess the accuracy of it at times for what happens in my heart. What is that about? – that I have such a hard time with expressions of worship that are different than mine? – I am quick to belittle it as disingenuous or dismiss it as insubstantial. Show me a screen and I'll despise it in my heart! Can you relate to that at all? I can try to defend Michal, or at least understand her – understand myself: is it about not wanting things to be showy? is it my own insecurity? is it wanting to defend God? is it my own fear of being judged? I'm sure I have some good reasons, but it's not good - Lord have mercy, I can relate to Michal. It is such an odd mix – this passion for worship, and this impulse to despise it in others; this deep sense of need to express gratitude and praise to God, and my deep suspicion of it in others.

So to try to make some sense of that here's what I'm going to do: say something about the Gospel story from Mark; say something about the Epistle lesson from Ephesians; and then say something to wrap this sermon up.

That story in Mark: King Herod with his religious fascination with John the Baptist; Herod's controversial wife who hates John; the young daughter dancing to deliver the head of John to her mother – the whole thing could be seen as a bizarrely warped reflection of the 2nd Samuel story, as religion and power and sexuality and lust and politics and violence are all perversely mixed together. There is lots of passion here, but it is all destructive - it is a sort of demonic worship, even, of all that denigrates and destroys life. And this particular disturbing story confronts us with something of what is at stake much more broadly, in life – that human power and passion can be so terribly warped and destructive; the human capacity for such harmful passion is immense.

The passage from Ephesians is its own sort of charismatic, passionate expression. Paul is expressing what life is as a follower of Jesus Christ, and off he goes: 'blessed with every blessing; praising God's glorious grace richly lavished on us; live for the praise of God's glory; a people praising the glory of God.' Paul speaks of life itself, all of life, as grounded in recognizing and being grateful for the goodness and gifts, the grace, of God. That is what we are made to do, Paul says: we are truly alive when we see our lives held in the blessings of God's grace.

So - When I think about worshipping God – about feeling passionate about it myself, yet judging it in others when they have that passion. When I think about this world, warped and broken with human passion turned against itself – destructive in every way. And then when I wonder what this world may wonder about what we do here – does worship have anything to do with what's going on in this world at all?! With all that - this is what I ask God to do this day: to take any passion I feel in worship, and use that to connect to all those places in life where gratitude, goodness, grace are found and felt. I ask God to take away any need to compare or judge, and instead in worshipping God be given a way to better see God's grace at work in this world. I ask for God's Spirit to teach us that our worship of God is about the passion God has created in us for

all to know the goodness and grace of God. So, “Dancing With the Choir” it is – worshipping God as a time that draws us to live and move and have our being in the grace and blessing of God – to join in a dance of life for all God’s children to share. AMEN.