

The Top 10 Reasons to Dance (almost) Naked

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

Psalm 100

John 2: 1-9a

July 12, 2009 – United Memorial

Some of you are no doubt familiar with David Letterman's Top 10 list.

I am rarely up that late, but I often listen to it in the morning.

So, today, as noted in the bulletin, we have the Top 10 Reasons to Dance Almost Naked:

- 10: Because it shows that we are not hiding anything from God.
- 9: When you shake your booty, you really shake it!
- 8: Takes focus away from lack of technique.
- 7: If shaped like most ministers, it will invite free gym memberships.
- 6: It gets people talking about something other than finances.
- 5: Kids can be kept amused counting wrinkles...
- 4: We finally understand why we have these poles in the middle of the floor!
- 3: Less likely to trip on your hem.
- 2: The congregation will all laugh at the same joke!!

And, the number one reason to dance naked is...

What's the big deal, I've already found myself preaching that way in my nightmares. (*Adapted from Ralph Milton's Rumors – An E-zine for Christians with a sense of humour*)

Now, you are probably wondering what on earth this has to do with the readings today...

When you heard the first reading, where David is dancing wearing only an ephod, did you stop and wonder what an ephod was?

While there is no definitive answer, scholars agree that it was some sort of liturgical accessory... perhaps a stole...

Can you imagine the headlines in the paper if some Sunday I danced from my apartment to the church wearing only a stole?

While that might do something to boost attendance, or not... I think all of us would be shocked at that!

Much like David's wife Michal, who was also King Saul's daughter, who finds such dancing demeaning for a king.

However, that is not the point of the reading or of the gospel reading... the point I see this week is that dancing and celebrating is a perfectly acceptable way in which to worship God.

And that we dance and celebrate no matter our circumstances.

In fact, I would go as far as to say that God loves exuberant celebration...

Look around you... flowers, trees, the teeming ocean, my daughter in law's belly as her pregnancy advances...

God's creation is not stiff constrained or limited...

It is exuberant... animated and passionate...

There is so much doom and gloom in the world... the environmental crisis, the economic crisis, wars in various places... threats from within and threats from without...

And so we might fall into the pit of thinking that is no point in dancing and celebrating, or doing so in the context of worship or that it is wrong to do so...

But remember, remember... the Hebrew people had more than their share of troubles... flooded out... enslaved at one time... wandering in the desert for 40 years...

And during the time of Jesus, they were an oppressed people... living under Roman rule... and yet... yet... they still celebrated weddings... and I am sure there was dancing...

Here are two stories about continuing to live, and to celebrate life and worship God in the face of danger...

The first from Jim Taylor, a United church layperson and writer, "I was in Belfast in 1974, at the height of the Troubles. It was a situation that few North Americans could imagine.

Soldiers walked back to back, for mutual protection.

Tanks clanked through downtown streets. Convoys of Land Rovers patrolled residential neighbourhoods.

There were roadblocks and security barricades everywhere.

You could not shop without being searched as you passed through a security checkpoint into the downtown area; you could not enter a store without being searched again.

Drivers expected to have their vehicles searched at randomly placed roadblocks.

Border crossings invoked rigid security.

Some streets had 30-foot barricades down the center -- too high for anyone to lob a grenade or Molotov cocktail over.

Police stations were ringed by 50-gallon drums filled with sand -- far enough out to dissipate the blast from car bombs.

But the ordinary people refused to be cowed.

Despite bombs and shootings, they continued to shop... They went to church... They went to work.

They stepped over sharp shooters lying prone on all four corners of an intersection, covering each other, weapons trained down the street for any sign of trouble.

And their leaders kept talking... To identify and overcome the causes of historic grievances.

As Michael Byers said, "The IRA taught the British an all-important lesson. If you are fighting to defend your way of life, you must not give up your way of life."

The second is a story out of Russia during the second world war...

A community was cut off from the outside world...

And as is often the case in times of extreme trouble, people banded together and shared what little they had...

There was the usual mix of people... There were young boys and old men... the ones in the middle had all been conscripted into the army...

There were women, children, a baker, a seamstress, a cobbler and so on... and there was a dancer...

It didn't seem that a dancer was much needed when you are trying to stay warm and fed...

And as the winter continued its bitter cold and food became scarcer and scarcer, the dancer felt more and more useless... this was her only skill... and in the face of starvation and death it seemed a waste of time... and she began to withdraw from the community feeling as if she were a drain on it...

The elders of the village came to see why they hadn't seen her... and she told them that she felt as if she were just a burden on their little community and they would be better off just leaving her to starve...

One of them tenderly drew her to her feet and said, "Please dance for us... dance reminds us of better days... dance tells us of truth and beauty... dance tells our story... dance gives us hope... come, dance for us..."

And in the midst of hunger and cold and bombs... she danced...

My friends, I don't expect any of us to dance naked or even almost naked... but let us not despair and become despondent... for God is with us in all circumstances...

So dance... celebrate... worship God... and share the Good News with exuberance and passion. Thanks be to God, amen.

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