

When We Danced
2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19
Second Baptist Church, Memphis
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We have had this wonderful music today...but music is so...impractical.

There are some practical benefits of music, I know. A child who is learning to read and play a piece on the piano exercises pattern and sequencing skills similar to those used in reading words. Music is also highly mathematical. I guess playing music also develops even physical coordination. Playing an instrument involves all kinds of fine motor skills and gross motor skills. Good singing involves all sorts of muscle control.

Scientists also study the amazing power that music has to awaken and stimulate and heal people struggling with various physical problems, emotional problems, psychological problems.

Sure there are some practical benefits to music, I know. But here this morning and again tonight we gather for no other reason than to sing and to celebrate and to be inspired by wonderful music. Should we be doing something more practical? There's a lot of work to be done, you know.

But we do have this very appropriate story today of an extravagant, musical celebration that has no practical use whatsoever.

David, the king, has led his people to win back the holy city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites. And so finally, after so many years of the people of God being separated into north and south—Israel and Judah—and after so many years of at least one of them being ruled over by some other people, David has restored the kingdom.

This scripture today is an account of David moving in the holy ark of the covenant after he had conquered Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a major plum for any young king, a town on a hill considered impregnable, *untakeable*.

Just to remind people who it was who had nevertheless finally taken it, David's first move was to change the name to the City of David. His second move to celebrate the restoration of the kingdom was to bring out the ark of the covenant.

The ark of the covenant was this holy box of acacia wood overlaid with gold. It contained who knows what, but it was the closest thing Israel ever had to a representation in space of their God who dwelled in eternity.

This ark had accompanied the children of Israel from Mount Sinai.

With the ark they had walked around the city of Jericho and saw God's power displayed as the walls came tumblin' down and the city was conquered.

The ark had been their constant reminder of God's presence.

And now, they were together again, the holy city of Jerusalem belonged to God's children again. And David brings out the

ark and parades it into Jerusalem. David had the ark loaded onto a custom-built cart and made a parade of it, complete with horns, harps, cymbals, not to mention David himself high-stepping it out in front. [*Frederick Buechner, Peculiar Treasures*]

This was certainly a moment of glory for David. It was like the ticker tape parade we will have in downtown Memphis when the Memphis Grizzlies win the NBA championship or the Memphis Tigers win the college football national championship and we line up along the street to cheer our conquering heroes.

David's parade was like that (and celebrating an event just as improbable)...but it was more than that.

David's moment of glory at the front of his parade was more than that. It wasn't superficial. It wasn't about popularity. This wasn't just politics, either. This wasn't just a public relations ploy.

This was celebration of the goodness of God. This was a bursting forth of the joy of being a child of God.

Somewhere along the way in this parade, David stripped down to something kind of like an apron and he danced. With trumpets blaring and drums beating, David danced.

And even though everyone was watching, including his disapproving wife, David wasn't dancing for anybody else but God. He wasn't dancing with anyone else but God. As Frederick Buechner describes it, David and the love of his life,

his God, cutting loose together, whirling around in a blaze of glory before the ark.

This story of David dancing before the Lord is like a dance partner who steps all over my toes. David steps on the toes today of sensible, reasonable, practical people like you and me.

David didn't just bring in the ark. David didn't just get the job done. He did it with extravagance.

Did it really take thirty thousand soldiers to carry a little box?

Wasn't it a little excessive to sacrifice a bull and a fatted calf every six steps?

Of course a brand new cart had to be used.

And what about David's dance? Is that really appropriate behavior for a king? His wife, Saul's daughter, Michal, certainly didn't think so. The king should be finding practical things to do. Weren't there potholes to fill?

David's dance gives me a picture of a celebration of a love so extravagant, so excessive, so disturbing, so beyond the call to mere practicality that it makes me want to leave all my efficient good works behind for a moment.

That's why David's dance steps on my toes. David's dance highlights in bold relief the difference between religious duty and God-given joy—the difference between obligation and celebration. David's dance steps on the toes of those of us who try so hard to do the right thing. Those of us who try so diligently to be the right kind of person.

Those of us who are serious about our life in Christ.

But those of us who do not know what it's like live in the bold, extravagant, nonsensical joy that comes from being in love with God.

When I picture David whirling around out front of that procession it gets my attention. There's wonderful music and dancing. And I don't dance. I have better things to do. I have more productive things to do. And besides, I might feel silly.

But there's that guy David out front that captures my attention today.

It's that guy half-dressed, oblivious to the world, dancing up a storm with God himself just because he's a man in love with God.

That passionate one doing the tango with the Creator of the universe.

That's the one I'm talking about today.

That's the one who makes me wonder about those of us who are soberly and seriously going about fulfilling our religious obligations and think we're living life as God intended us to live. David's dance represents, I think, the missing piece in our life with Christ—so missing, in fact, that a lot of us don't even know it's missing.

We think we're doing our duty in following Jesus because we're trying our hardest to do the right thing. We think we're

fulfilling our Christian obligations. And we've talked a lot over these last several weeks of the cost of discipleship.

But how many people would look at you and be bowled over by the joy of the Lord that is bursting forth from your life? Would anyone? Do people look at you and see a life overflowing with abundant life and joy?

You've heard or read the story "Footprints." I guess it's one of the most well known Christian stories of all time; it's about the person who sees the footprints in the sand and wonders why in the most difficult times of life there was only one set of prints. And God says, *That was when I carried you.*

Let me share with you a version of that story that's a little different.

[Thanks to Dr. Brian Harbour, First Baptist Church, Richardson, Texas, for this story]

It's a dream. And you imagine in this dream that you're walking along this beach with God, and there are two sets of footprints. God's prints are going straight and strong and firm. You're footprints are all over the place. Zigs and zags and stops and moving one way and moving another, moving forward, moving back. God's are just right down the line, and yours are everywhere.

And it goes on like this for awhile, and then all of a sudden, the zigging and the zagging stops, and the starting and the stopping stops and all of a sudden your footprints are right beside God's and almost parallel to his. And it goes this way for awhile.

And then suddenly something happens, and you look and you see that there's one set of footprints, but there's a footprint inside the footprint. There's the great big footprint of God, and there's your little footprint in the sand inside of God's big footprint. And you're walking in the steps of God with your little steps, and you're following along the direction God is going. And that goes on for awhile.

And all of a sudden you realize that your footprints are getting bigger and you begin to realize that you can't even see but one set of footprints because yours are so closely identified with those of God. And this goes on for a long time.

But then something happens. All of a sudden there are two sets of footprints again. And your footprints are going everywhere—moving back and forth and zigging and zagging and to the left and to the right and God's footprints—they're doing the same.

There are footprints all over the place. God's and yours just zigging, zagging, back and forth. And you're distressed. You don't know what's going on. Then you wake up. Dream's over.

So you say, *God, wait a minute, I've got to talk to you. I don't understand what's happening. Now I know how it started with me zigging and zagging and back and forth. That was when I was first becoming a Christian and I was totally out of control and undisciplined and going in every direction. And there you were just walking that firm straight path. But I just couldn't somehow keep up with you.*

And God says, *That's right. That's the way you were.*

And then you say, I guess that when I finally started walking beside you was when I started growing in my spiritual life, and as I was growing in my spiritual life I began to parallel some of the things you had laid out for me and began to walk in the direction you wanted me to go.

And God says, *Precisely.*

And then, I guess that when my footprints got on top of yours was when I began really in my spiritual maturity to walk in your steps, to do what you asked me to do.

And God says, *That's exactly right.*

And then I guess when my footprints enlarged and it was like it was one footprint, those were the times when I was really walking closely with you.

And God says, *That's right. You understand everything just exactly the way it is.*

But then you say, *God I got to ask you about this last part. I don't understand. After walking in parallel with you and then walking in your steps and then becoming like you with my footprints merging into yours, all of a sudden the steps are everywhere.*

What happened, God?

Did I regress?

Did I give up?

Did I turn away from you?

Were you chasing me?

God, what happened?

And God laughs.

God says, *Don't you understand? Don't you know?* God says.

That was when we danced.

So I go back to the questions I asked last week. Are you ready for the joy? Are you able today to respond to God's invitation to joy? Jesus said—and I think this is part of what a composer says, and part of what a choir says, part of what a musician says—*Rejoice with me.*

Will you and God be able to look back over your life and say, *Remember that? That was when we danced?*