

Sunday July 15, 2018
Year B, Pentecost 8
2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19 [omitted section indented]
“Dancing for Joy”
St. Andrews United Church, Bayfield
© Rev. Elise Feltrin

2 Samuel 6:1-19 Good News Translation

Once more David called together the best soldiers in Israel, a total of thirty thousand men, and led them to Baalah in Judah, in order to bring from there God's Covenant Box, bearing the name of the Lord Almighty, whose throne is above the winged creatures. They took it from Abinadab's home on the hill and placed it on a new cart. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the cart, with Ahio walking in front. David and all the Israelites were dancing and singing with all their might to honor the Lord. They were playing harps, lyres, drums, rattles, and cymbals.

[As they came to the threshing place of Nacon, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah reached out and took hold of the Covenant Box. At once the Lord God became angry with Uzzah and killed him because of his irreverence. Uzzah died there beside the Covenant Box, and so that place has been called Perez Uzzah ever since. David was furious because the Lord had punished Uzzah in anger.

Then David was afraid of the Lord and said, “How can I take the Covenant Box with me now?” So he decided not to take it with him to Jerusalem; instead, he turned off the road and took it to the house of Obed Edom, a native of the city of Gath. It stayed there three months, and the Lord blessed Obed Edom and his family.

King David heard that because of the Covenant Box the Lord had blessed Obed Edom's family and all that he had;]

...so he got the Covenant Box from Obed's house to take it to Jerusalem with a great celebration. After the men carrying the Covenant Box had gone six steps, David had them stop while he offered the Lord a sacrifice of a bull and a fattened calf. David, wearing only a linen cloth around his waist, danced with all his might to honor the Lord. And so he and all the Israelites took the Covenant Box up to Jerusalem with shouts of joy and the sound of trumpets.

As the Box was being brought into the city, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked out of the window and saw King David dancing and jumping around in the sacred dance, and she was disgusted with him. They brought the Box and put it in its place in the Tent that David had set up for it. Then he offered sacrifices and fellowship offerings to the Lord. When he had finished offering the sacrifices, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord Almighty and distributed food to them all. He gave each man and woman in Israel a loaf of bread, a piece of roasted meat, and some raisins. Then everyone went home.

On a warm, starlit night a couple of weeks ago, I was fortunate to be part of a magical evening at Camp Menesetung.

It was the counsellor's training week – the calm before the storm when their young charges arrive for the rest of the summer with all their prevailing energy and chaos.

You might recall many of these same camp counsellors swooping in to help us clean up after the Canada Day BBQ as part of their community outreach.

This too was part of their training week, which is intended to be an orientation of sorts as they prepare to run week-long camp programs for the rest of the busy summer – but also, very

importantly, it is a time of team-building for the counsellors, as they get to know each other, learn how to co-operate and build trust.

And so on the evening I was there, we were learning to dance together.

Now, not what you might think – this wasn't modern free-style individual dancing, but the very ancient form of Sacred Circle Dance.

Led by Sarah, a trained facilitator in this tradition, we began, by first learning to respect the centre of the circle – a focal point, in this case designed of flowers and rocks.

We were then taught to notice those around us – and to move in co-ordination, but always keeping an eye to maintain the full rounded shape of the circle. Gradually, we learned some simple steps, added some graceful arm movements, and eventually even some clapping, twirls and leaps.

As the music played, we slowly danced in unison around the circle – each person focussed on their own movements, but also keenly aware of being in sync with those around them. It was a sight to behold these young men and women – some of them initially shy, or protesting 'I don't know how to dance' – but they quickly gained the confidence to move together and re-create something both very ancient and very beautiful.

As dusk descended on the rosy-hued sky, enchanted by the magic of the evening, the counsellors soon lost all inhibitions and despite their cut-off shorts, funky camp t-shirts and ballcaps – they were dancing like ladies and gentlemen of the Medieval court.

In one dance, they bowed and curtsied to each other; in another traditional Israeli dance, they raised their arms and symbolically showered each other with blessings, and in yet another African rhythm they pounded the dry earth with their barefeet, kicking up a storm of dust and grounding themselves in the earth's sacred energy.

These global dances were ancient, they were fun, and they were also very holy.

The entire evening was a uniquely memorable experience that solidly united all those involved – instilling in them a sense of accomplishment at learning something new, a sense of teamwork in doing it together and a sense of wonder at the sacred power in synchronized movement, and the unbridled joy it can release.

These are not the type of dances you can do by yourself! They must be danced in community....as a shared experience.
And this, is what makes them sacred.

We don't often dance in church. As a matter of fact, some churches have a long tradition of banning any form of dancing, and even of banning music from their worship.

Today's scripture passage, should put those ideas to rest.

David and all the Israelites were dancing and singing with all their might to honor the Lord. They were playing harps, lyres, drums, rattles, and cymbals.....

There's a serious worship party going on!

But first, let's back up a bit, and understand why.....what's this celebration all about? Well if you've read your Hebrew scriptures – you may recall hearing about something referred to either as 'The Ark of Covenant' or the 'Covenant Box' – which was a symbolic chest of sorts, thought to represent the presence of God. (and yes, this is one and the same 'Lost Ark' that Indiana Jones set out to rescue!)

The Ark of Covenant was originally handcrafted according to instructions given by God to Moses – (which somewhat contradicts the commandment about worshipping idols – but that's for another sermon)

Anyways, with great reverence and respect this Ark travels with the Hebrew people all the way from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land. It becomes somewhat of a talisman for them, thought to bring blessing and good fortune. So naturally, soon enough their enemies seek to capture it, in order to deplete the Israelites of their secret weapon, and reap its benefits for themselves.

The Philistines manage to do this, but the Ark only brings them great pain and suffering, so eventually they return it.

The Ark, as the self-revelation of God, is a mysterious thing – to some it brings great rejoicing, to others, it brings death.

The section of today's passage that the lectionary reading actually skips over (verses 6-12) is disturbing and confusing – telling how poor Uzzah, reaching out to steady the Ark on its cart as oxen pull it over a bumpy road, is struck down by God for daring to touch it. This seems rather drastic and unfair!

But to David and the Hebrew people, it demonstrates the mystery and volatility of God.

So why are they moving this dangerous, yet sacred icon? This is where today's story picks up.....

David, the up and coming King who has managed to unite the north and south of Israel that have been estranged for generations – is returning the Ark to its rightful place in Jerusalem (or 'The City of David' as it becomes known).

The goal, is to place God, represented in the Ark of Covenant, back at the centre of their communal life.

To be restored as the focal point – much like the flower and rock arrangement at the centre of our sacred dance circle – around which everything else revolves.

And as it should be!

Our lives should revolve around God – whether we're dancing, or worshipping or buying the groceries, or puttering around the house....or leading a group of kids at summer camp - God **is** the stillpoint of our circle. The centre of our universe. The reason and purpose of our living.

And do you recall how David responds once the Ark/God is taking its rightful place at the centre of their lives?

He dances with all his might – rejoicing with music and movement. Then he pauses, to immediately offer a sacrifice honouring this momentous event– and then, once they arrive back in Jerusalem – he blesses the people, and distributes food to them.

With God at the centre of our lives – we too can rejoice, sacrifice and serve.
And like the dancers in the Sacred Circle Dance, ‘we’ as God’s creatures, move around in unison, striving to stay aware of the presence of others around us, trying to maintain equilibrium and stay in step with the rest of humanity.

Our entire lives are really a sacred dance.

And our best bet is to find and hold our place in the ever-expanding circle, try to remain grounded, shower blessings upon others as we can, and graciously acknowledge the presence of others who are dancing alongside us as best they can.

The steps may sometimes get tricky, the ground may be occasionally uneven, perhaps we can’t always hear the music
– but when we join in the grand circle of humanity, with God at the centre, we need not worry about leading – but we can trust in following the movements of others, as we learn to dance with abandon, dance with joy, and immerse ourselves in the flow of the Spirit.

And perhaps like David, we too might then be inspired to respond, by giving thanks to God with all our might, and then, by feeding and caring for others...

May we trust in the power of the circle that unites us, with God at the centre.

May we celebrate with joy, serve with compassion and when we’re feeling less than joyful, may we be carried along by the energy of those who dance through life with us.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

Pastoral Prayer:

God of the dance;

With joyful rejoicing we come before you and take our place in the circle.

With hesitant steps, we join with others in this holy dance –

And watch to ensure that all are included,

All can hear the music,

And all can follow along.

Bless us with unity as we learn together –

Build us up as a co-ordinated community – working in unison to spread your Good News through our sometimes fumbling, sometimes grace-filled movements.

We give thanks for your presence at our centre.

Help us to maintain our sense of equilibrium as our lives teeter around you,

Bring balance and focus to us when we are unsure;

And give us the humility to follow those who have danced these steps before.

God, as we glance around the circle and acknowledge those around us, help us to notice their needs....

Especially those we now lift to you in silent prayer.....

We entrust the needs of the world to your care,

and await your response to be channeled through our actions.

In unison with disciples through the ages, we dedicate our service and lift our prayers to you in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray....our father who art in heaven.....