

“GOD’S GIFTS: II – ‘DANCE, THEN, WHEREVER YOU MAY BE’”

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Elkton United Methodist Church

September 15, 2019

II Samuel 6:12-15

Mark 5:24a-34

There’s a show I like to watch on TV on Wednesday nights called “The Little Couple.” It’s about Jen Arnold and Bill Klein, both of whom are little people. I think Bill stands about five feet tall, and Jen maybe four and a half feet tall. Anyway, they’ve been married for eleven years and live in St. Petersburg, Florida where she is a physician at the Johns Hopkins Children’s Hospital there.

During the early years of their marriage, they hoped to have children, but that wasn’t to be, so they turned to adoption. And over the course of a few years, they adopted a son from China, whom they named Will, and a daughter from India whom they named Zoe.

From the time they adopted these children, Jen and Bill knew they wanted to help them connect with their ethnic heritage when they got a little older. And so now that they are school age or so, they’re finding opportunities to do that. The most recent couple of episodes of the series have actually been about connecting Zoe with her Indian roots. Last week, the family went to a “holle” festival, which featured all sorts of bright colors and deep Indian spices – it’s a celebration of spring and newness of life.

This week’s episode featured Zoe and her class in Indian dancing. Here is this tiny little girl (for both of the kids are little people as well) dancing her heart out, learning “Bollywood” dancing as they call it. But what was most amazing to watch was how the process of learning the dances opened up so many doors for Zoe to learn more about her roots.

Almost every time Zoe came upon an Indian person, she would quietly ask them, “Were you born in India?” and then ask them more and more questions. And the more questions she asked, the more she would light up. It was like, in a way, she was coming home.

Well, by the time the dance recital came, she had encountered a lot of Indian people and gotten Indian garb and jewelry and been a part of some of the customs. So on the night of the recital, with her adoring family in the first few rows of the auditorium, little Zoe danced her heart out. You could feel the joy absolutely flowing out of her!

Dancing helped her show the deep feelings she was feeling, as I think it does for all who dance. And I’m pretty sure that’s the case with some wonderful guests we have with

us this morning from Bobbie Ann's Dance Studio. Our very own Anna Smith is one of their instructors there, and a few months ago, I asked Anna about dancing or having them dance for our worship services one Sunday. There's something about dancing that connects you with the Spirit, that allows you to express your deep feelings with your body as you let the music speak to you, and through you.

So this morning they are going to dance for us, to a lovely song entitled "Mary, Did You Know?"

DANCE TROUPE DANCES.

Did you notice that there were dancers in this morning's scripture lessons? Well, one literally danced, and another figuratively danced. But there were dancers.

The first, in the lesson from the Hebrew scriptures, was a very familiar fellow named David. We talked about him last week, remember? We talked about his confession after his affair with Bathsheba and how God forgave him, helped him pick up the pieces of his life and gave him a new future. Today, this same King David, is experiencing a high moment in his life, a moment of victory, of triumph, of rejoicing.

For the ark of the covenant has been returned to God's people, after being taken away for a long time. That was a huge deal, because the ark of the covenant represented the very presence of Almighty God. It was no small thing, getting the ark back to its proper home – in fact, people died making it happen.

But then came the day of its return, and so filled with joy about it was King David, that he leapt to his feet and danced – in front of God and everybody! He danced with wild abandon, with delight, with thanksgiving. He danced and danced and danced – the King danced!

Now, you have to know that not everybody was thrilled with that. In fact, his wife Michal, was downright embarrassed and dressed him down afterwards. No matter, David let the Spirit wash over him, and in his joy over the return of the ark, he could do no other, but dance a dance of joy and thanksgiving!

His joy was loud and clear and right out there for everybody to see. Not so, with the central character in the Gospel lesson. Oh, she was filled with joy as well, but her dance, if you will, was quieter.

Remember her story? Here was a woman who had suffered from hemorrhaging for years and years and years – 12 years to be exact. She had tried everything to be healed of her suffering, and nothing worked. Yet, she never gave up, and one day, when Jesus came to town, she knew she had to get to him. That turned out to be nigh unto impossible

because great crowds were following him at this point – it was wall to wall people. But in a last, desperate attempt to get to him, she grabbed at the hem of his garment and upon touching him she was healed. Jesus felt it and turned to find her standing there, commended her for her great faith and sent her on her way.

But oh, without a doubt, she went on her way with joy and thanksgiving. She was a new woman, set free from the suffering that had tied her down for so long. And I have no doubt that her joy shined on her face, and in the way she moved, and the lightness of her being. And I would imagine that she shared her story of healing and God's blessings on her life with anybody who would listen. "The hand of Jesus touched me, and now I am no longer the same!" I think that's how that woman danced!

Joy – the joy of a little girl discovering her heritage, the joy of the return of a sign of a God, the joy of healing – reasons to dance and celebrate! Friends, someone has written that "Joy is our heritage as Christians. It is our legacy. Faith in Christ can give us a genuine and deep happiness that enables us to rejoice always, no matter what our outer circumstances." (James W. Moore, *Attitude is Our Paintbrush*, "The Attitude of Joy," p. 84)

Of all people, we have reason to rejoice and dance always, because we know how blessed we are by God in Jesus Christ. He loved us so much he sent his Son for us and for our salvation. And he pours upon us blessing upon blessing. As the choir sang, how can we keep from singing?

Yet, too often, we don't. Truth be told, too often, we're a little like David's wife, afraid of public demonstrations of joy. The Rev. James Moore writes that some "have forgotten that the Christian faith is 'good news of great joy.' They have lost touch with the 'cheerful tidings of the Gospel,' and have chosen instead to come down hard with 'tearful chidings of the Gospel.'" (Ibid, p. 85) While that's a clever play on words, nonetheless, it is true. Too often, joy is sorely lacking among believers.

It's interesting, isn't it, that we can get so excited about a football or baseball game, a great movie we've seen or book that we've read, a great restaurant we visited or a new recipe we tried that we can't wait to talk about with a friend, yet we're reluctant to talk to them about the joy of our faith. Actually, it's not interesting, it's sad.

Do you remember me telling you a while ago about how the great preacher Tony Campolo went to a class reunion and discovered that a guy he had gone to school with, and actually was pretty close to back then, had recently become a Christian. He was all excited about it and was telling Tony all about the change in his life because of it. Tony told him how glad he was, because he was a Christian too! And you remember what his friend said? "You are? When did you become a Christian?" Well, Tony had been a Christian since he was a child, and that comment really shook him up, because clearly the joy of his faith was

not at all evident back then. (Tony Campolo, *Let Me Tell You a Story*, “What We Overhear About How to Lead a Christian Life,” p. 111)

Let me ask you this: Is yours? Do people know you’re a person of faith? Do they see the joy of your faith evident in your life? I hope so.

Now, hear me when I say this. I don’t mean that you’re expected to be dancing all the time, or shouting from the rooftops about your faith. How you express your joy is an individual thing. Dancing in your life will look different from dancing in someone else’s. Still, the question is: is the joy of your faith evident to others?

My friends, people around you are desperate for good news, for joy. And you know the answer to their longing – Jesus the Christ! You know, because you are a beloved child of God, blessed by him in so many ways. You come here and worship him regularly. You see people whose lives have been changed, and you know how your life is different because of your faith. People want what you have – they want joy, and peace, and assurance.

I think these scriptures today invite us to think about how we dance our faith, if you will, and if we’re not sharing the joy of our faith with others, start to think about how we can. Please listen, I’m not saying you have to go out and confront people and ask them if they’ve been saved. I’m saying that we should find ways to share the joy of faith in Jesus Christ each in our own way.

Let me suggest some ways:

When you’re talking to a friend, neighbor or co-worker and they’re sharing a problem with you, offer to pray for them, or ask if you can put them on our church’s prayer list. What you’re telling them without saying it right out, is that you’re a person of faith, you believe in the power of prayer, and you believe in the power of God to help people with their problems.

Or here’s another. How about in your conversations and in the way you live you focus on the positive rather than on the negative things in life? It’s so easy to jump on the bandwagon and gripe about things, but focusing on the positive tells people that you’re a person of faith who prefers to focus on blessings rather than everything that’s wrong.

I have a little ornament that hangs right above my desk at home and on it are written the words, “Today, I Choose Joy.” I try to look at that every morning when I start my day, and actually the other day when things were heavy and overwhelming and I was dealing with some complicated issues, I intentionally said those words as I started my day – “Today, I Choose Joy.” It made a difference for me and I hope a difference in the lives of those with whom I interacted that day.

Another way to dance your faith, dance the joy of your faith, is to tell people about the church and your church family. I know some of you feel uncomfortable asking people to come to church with you, but I found, over the years, that just telling people stories about our church made them curious enough to want to try it for themselves.

A few years ago, there was a guy I knew in a business setting who lives not far from here, and I said something to him one day about coming to church. He turned me down, saying going to church was not his thing. I said, “Okay,” but then I started telling him about our Thanksgiving gift card giveaway that we do every year. I told him how we take an offering one day, then buy a bunch of gift cards, and hand them out on Thanksgiving Day to people who have to work – like police officers, hospital workers, and so on. You know what? His eyes lit up, and he said, “Now, that’s cool. That’s a kind of church I could get into.”

You see what I mean? There are ways to dance, ways to spread joy, all different ways – to reach others with the love and joy of a life in Christ. You just need to find your own way. But find it you should, because the world desperately needs God now more than ever. People are longing for answers, and the answers can be found in him and him alone.

My friends, you and I are blessed people. We are blessed.

We woke up this morning and were able to get out of bed and be here together.

We’ve been blessed by smiles and hugs, by words and music, by dancers and singers, by little children, youth and adults.

Some of you will be blessed by going out after church with friends, others will be blessed spending time with our new youth director and choir director, still others will be blessed by studying the Word together.

Just think about your own life and the abundant blessings God has poured upon you. How, indeed, can we keep from singing and dancing? How can we not praise God every day? We are people, who, as the hymn we’re about to sing will remind us, have been touched by the hand of Jesus, and because of that, we are never the same.

So go forth from this place today with joy – dancing your faith! Dance, then, wherever, you may be, that others will know of the love of Christ in their lives too! May it be so!

Amen.