

“Dancing to a Different Rhythm”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

July 11, 2021 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

Hymns for Worship Video – July 11, 2021

“How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds” #357 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1, 2, 4, 6

V. 1 How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds

In a believer’s ear

It soothes our sorrows heals our wounds

And drives away our fear

V. 2 It makes the wounded spirit whole

And calms the troubled breast

‘Tis manna to the hungry soul

And to the weary rest

V. 4 Jesus my Saviour Shepherd Friend

My Prophet Priest and King

My Lord my Life my Way my End

Accept the praise I bring

V. 6 Till then I would Your love proclaim

With every fleeting breath

And may the music of Your Name

Refresh my soul in death

Dick Grout / John Newton

© Words: Public Domain Music: 2009 Grout, Dick CCLI License # 1952948

“Seek Ye First” #625 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1 – 3

V. 1 Seek ye first the kingdom of God

And His righteousness

And all these things

Shall be added unto you

Allelu alleluia

V. 2 We shall not live by bread alone

But by ev'ry word

That proceeds

From the mouth of God

Allelu alleluia

V. 3 Ask and it shall be given unto you
Seek and ye shall find
Knock and the door
Shall be opened unto you
Allelu alleluia

Karen Lafferty

© 1972 CCCM Music (Admin. by Brentwood-Benson Music Publishing, Inc.)

Universal Music - Brentwood Benson Publishing (Admin. by Brentwood-Benson Music Publishing, Inc.) CCLI License # 1952948

Closing Chorus: "Go now in peace"

Go now in peace
Never be afraid
God will go with you each hour of every day
Go now in faith steadfast strong and true
Know he will guide you in all you do
Go now in love
And show you believe
Reach out to others so all the world can see
God will be there watching from above
Go now in peace in faith & in love.
Amen Amen Amen

Don Besig & Nancy Price, Harold Flammer Music 1988, 1989

Scripture Texts: 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12-19

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. ² David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. ³ They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart ⁴ with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. ⁵ David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

¹² It was told King David, "The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; ¹³ and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. ¹⁴ David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. ¹⁵ So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

¹⁶ As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.

¹⁷ They brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the Lord. ¹⁸ When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts, ¹⁹ and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

Mark 6:14-29

¹⁴ King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." ¹⁵ But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." ¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." ¹⁷ For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. ¹⁸ For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, ²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. ²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. ²² When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." ²³ And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." ²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." ²⁵ Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." ²⁶ The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸ brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹ When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Meditation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have all found different ways to fill our time. We have not been able to be on the run all the time, a reality about which I am NOT complaining, so we've taken up other activities. Some have picked up a hobby. Some are reading more. Many people are gardening for the first time, or taking their gardening to a new level. People are experimenting with new recipes and exercise routines. In the evenings, I've started watching more sports than just basketball, getting a little bit back into hockey during the playoffs (sigh), watching baseball, that sort of thing. I've also been watching documentaries, learning

about all kinds of interesting history. My dad has also been watching documentaries, although his have been centered around music artists he's always liked. He's told me about Linda Ronstadt, the Eagles, Willie Nelson, and others. The one that stuck with me was ABBA. They get my Swedish blood pumping. So I watched a documentary about them one rainy evening. I particularly enjoyed the part about their introduction of a favourite of ABBA's songs, "Dancing Queen." The group shared their memory of their first live performance of the song in 1976. It was at a televised gala celebrating the wedding of Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf and Silvia Sommerlath. That performance, in which the band was dressed in 18th-century finery, launched their most successful international single. What is it about that song that makes it so popular, across the generations, even all these years later?

I read an article about it, and there are a few reasons why we love "Dancing Queen" so much. It has laser-sharp harmonies, giving the singers chills as they recorded the vocals, they recalled. Perhaps it's the lyrics – being freed from the cares of life for a few moments on the dance floor: "Friday night and the lights are low..." The song has a complex musical structure that makes it unmistakably ABBA, and it is impossible for anyone else to capture its appeal.¹ It has had, and still has, a legacy of greatness in music. Admit it, you sway to the music when you hear it played, don't you?

Music is a big part of our lives. And we have all sorts of responses to it. It can make us laugh, cry, smile, remember and sing along. It can calm us when the day feels chaotic, and it can cheer us up when we feel a little down. It makes us clap our hands, tap our toes, and yes, it can have the effect of making us want to dance. And it doesn't matter whether we have any sense of rhythm or musical talent, in anyone's eyes. We can dance to our own rhythms. We can hum our own tunes. We can set our own beat and tempo. We don't need anyone's approval to enjoy music however it moves us to do so. We don't need anyone's approval to dance.

LeeAnn Womack's hit song says it well...

I hope you never lose your sense of wonder
 You get your fill to eat but always keep that hunger
 May you never take one single breath for granted
 God forbid love ever leave you empty-handed
 I hope you still feel small when you stand beside the ocean
 Whenever one door closes I hope one more opens
 Promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance
 And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance
 I hope you dance...²

Dance is a way for people to express themselves, even to communicate. I've seen interpretive and liturgical dance that has moved me to tears. I've seen Indigenous dances that are so powerful I stand in awe of the stamina and passion of the dancers. Dance can be a

¹ Quoted and adapted in this and the previous paragraph from udiscovermusic.com. "Dancing Queen: The Floor-Filling Legacy of ABBA's Greatest Song."

² Song: "I Hope you Dance" Written by Mark Sanders and Tia M. Sillers. Recorded by LeeAnn Womack. Released in 2001.

communicative art. Look at the story of David dancing as he led the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem. He danced before the Lord in celebration, thanksgiving and faithfulness. He danced before the Lord with all his might. His wife Michal, daughter of Saul, saw him dancing and was less than impressed. But that didn't deter him. He wore a linen ephod, a priestly garment, for which he had set aside his royal clothing. The ephod covered front and back, and was reserved for the priests. David was expressing himself as a representative of God's kingdom of priests. The fact that he was wearing it instead of his royal robes sent a clear message: this was a moment to worship, to dance before the Lord, to express thanksgiving that the Ark had been returned to the city. It was not a moment to be royal, but to be loyal. And David worshipped with ecstatic, passionate joy to mark the occasion.

David danced to his own rhythm in response to God's having led him to bring the Ark home. He didn't need anyone's approval, not even his wife's. He only needed to worship the Lord, and he did so with his dancing.

In the Gospel reading today, we see a different kind of dance, with a different meaning. This was not an act of worship, an expression of faithfulness to God. The dance in this story was one of exploitation and manipulation. It was a means of getting what was wanted. This rhythm was altogether different from that to which David danced. It was a rhythm marred by revenge. Many have surmised the girl's dance was seductive in nature, but Mark's story doesn't say that. It simply declares she went in and danced for Herod and his guests. She was used as a form of entertainment, and as a pawn in her mother's scheme. And her mother got what she wanted through her daughter's talent. It was a different time and culture than we know, one in which power was like gold. Once one had it, like Herod, one did not want to do anything to tarnish it. So when Herod made an oath, in front of witnesses, to give the young girl whatever she asked for, he had to follow through, lest he be shamed in the midst of his people and guests. No matter how much it grieved him, Herod had to give the order that John be beheaded.

It may sound like a nice thing to always get what we want, but it isn't always the best thing. We have to be careful what we wish for, or pray for, because we just might get it.

At the beginning of Mark's story, the writer provides some detail about who people thought Jesus was. These details connect John and Jesus in mission and in politics. Some thought Jesus was John resurrected. Some thought he was Elijah. Others thought he was a prophet like those "from of old." Herod believed he was John whom Herod himself had had beheaded. Was he thinking Jesus and the power he showed were the consequence of Herod's having ordered John's death? We know Herod knew John was righteous, a holy man, and Mark tells us he protected him. Herod's wife, on the other hand, formerly his brother's wife, despised John. She wanted him dead because he had told Herod he should not have married her. He had 'taken' her from his brother. Was Herod protecting John from Herodias' hatred? John's message was confusing to Herod, but he liked to listen to him nonetheless. Does this sound like a man who wanted to see John dead? No. But in his desire for power and authority he made a mistake. He made a promise, in front of witnesses. And that promise led him to take action against the very person he was protecting.

Herodias, holding a terrible grudge against John for the message he had given to Herod, worked things to her favour. She exploited her daughter, using her to get what she wanted to satisfy her own dark desires. When Herod asked the girl what she wanted in response to her dancing for his guests, she ran to her mother. Herod likely expected her to ask for jewels, or wealth, or a part of his kingdom. But it was her mother's request that was presented, not her own. I suppose pleasing her mother may have been what the daughter wanted, Herodias sounds like a rather frightening woman. I realize it was a different time, a different culture, a different kind of power, but I find it terribly disturbing and unjust. Who did Herod fear more; John or Herodias? What did he fear more; losing his power or experiencing Herodias' rage? The story doesn't say, but I can't help but wonder what was really going through Herod's mind as this all played out. "Even after his agreement to fulfill his oath, Herod 'deeply grieved' in Mark's account (6:26). This word, *perilupos* ('deeply grieved, sadness'), was used only here and to describe Jesus' feelings in Gethsemane (14:34)."³ Herod's need to save face overshadowed his desire to save a life, and his grief was undoubtedly deepened by his guilt.

A dance was used to manipulate a king. It was used as a tool for selfish and dark purposes. Far from an expression of joy in worship, that dance led to the death of God's messenger.

What a contrast from David's dance that expressed praise and celebration to God. His were not the only feet to be moving and dancing to a joyful rhythm, as the text tells us there were tens of thousands dancing with him! It was a response to being in God's presence, one that could not be controlled. Only Michal expressed her dislike of the scene, because she could only see the human element of the dancing. She could not see the faithfulness, the worship, in it. A professor of early church history writes: "The ark is a concrete symbol of God's self-revelation to Moses. As a ritual object, the ark tells a story. It points to the larger narrative of God's delivering the people from slavery and divine guidance into the promised land. It reminds the people of this salvation history and of the nearness of God's Presence with them always. It provided continuity from the time of Moses to the present moment described in 2 Samuel 6. First and foremost, the ark is a concrete sign of God's Holy Presence."⁴

David danced in the sight of God and all the people in response to God's holy presence! He danced in response to God, God's deliverance, and God's holiness among the people. He danced with joy. He danced in faithfulness and worship. He danced because his whole being gave thanks and praise to God who had led the people out of slavery and brought the symbol of God's presence back to the holy city. He danced because throughout their history, God remained with them. And those around him danced too.

³ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-15-2/commentary-on-mark-614-29-5>. Written by Emerson Powery, Professor of Biblical Studies, Messiah College, Grantham, PA, USA.

⁴ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-15-2/commentary-on-2-samuel-61-5-12b-19>. Written by Amy G. Oden, Visiting Professor of Early Church History and Spirituality, Saint Paul School of Theology, Oklahoma City, Okla.

Several years ago at a Canada Youth evening worship service, one of the worship leaders, also a leader within the national church, called for a special offering that would benefit a particular mission of the national church. As he called for participants to give what they could in response to what God was doing through this ministry, he invited them to dance as they gave, and those presenting the offerings for prayer and blessing would dance them to the front of the auditorium to be received. Beforehand, the leader had confessed to a few of us that he was somewhat uncomfortable about dancing in front of everyone while he waited for the offering to be brought forward, but as the young people and adult participants got into the music, he began to dance. Perhaps not as excitedly as David danced, but as he saw the crowd moving and swaying, it became contagious. We all felt it, and we all started to dance. There was music and laughter and joy. And there was a sense of freedom as young people from a wide variety of backgrounds and church experiences realized that this was a form of worship with which they were unfamiliar, and in which they could express what they felt. So they danced. After the service ended and the young folks were on their way back to their dorms, I overheard a conversation in which a teenaged girl said she had never danced in church before. Her friends agreed. And one of them said, "I wish we could do it again. What a great way to show we're paying attention to what God is up to."

Have you ever danced in church? Why not? What's holding you back? Are you worried about what your neighbours would think, like Michal? Are you concerned that people would think you're looking for attention, like Herodias? Well, I can't promise there won't be some who have those thoughts. But that's their problem. Dance anyway.

Dance with the Spirit.

Dance in thanksgiving.

Sway in peaceful rhythms,

Tap your toes in joyful exuberance.

Dance when there is music playing.

Dance to the rhythm you hear in your own heart.

Promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance,

and when you get the choice to sit it out or dance,

I hope you dance. Amen.

