

---

## *Dancing Before the Lord*

**A sermon by Canon Wallace Marsh**

**Proper 10 – Year B**

*Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD... 2 Samuel 6:16*

In high school there was one place I feared the most—the dance floor. My parents were convinced I was shy and was scared of girls. Yes, that was part of the truth, but the whole truth was if you asked a girl to the dance, there was a social expectation that you would actually dance, and I was terrified of the dance floor.

Now college was a different story. With the help of some liquid courage, I found my way onto the dance floor and couldn't stop dancing. During my freshman year, I spent more time dancing than in the library, and that can be supported by the fact that my fraternity bestowed upon me the pledge name of "Manero," named after Tony Manero, John Travolta's character in *Saturday Night Fever*.

I began to enjoy dancing so much, that to the surprise of my parents, I even signed up to take dancing lessons with a good high school friend. Dancing was so much fun that I didn't even need liquid courage to attend those classes!

Dancing plays a prominent role in today's readings. In 2 Samuel, we see King David dancing before the Lord, and in Mark's gospel, we see King Herod captivated by the dancing of Herodias' daughter.

So, why all this dancing in today's readings? What are we to take away from these unusual and maybe even disturbing passages of scripture? After all, Jesus isn't present or even mentioned in today's gospel. So, what is the point of all this dancing?

Let me answer those questions with a statement: *The most important thing about dancing is realizing that dancing involves a loss of power.*

Here is what I mean by that statement: The only way two individuals learn to move as one is by giving up power and learning to trust. Good dancers are so connected that they move effortlessly across the dance floor.

We have all seen couples struggle on the dance floor. This struggle isn't a result of one person being born with two left feet! It is really a struggle about control and power, and the inability to relinquish it and trust your dance partner.

So, if dancing is a process of losing power and gaining trust, then Herodias' daughter must have been one hell of a dancer.

At our Tuesday Morning Bible Study, Canon Maxwell told the staff that Herodias' daughter was performing the Dance of the Seven Veils, and I promised him that I wouldn't Google that on my work computer!

My guess is this dance had a few more moves than the Tennessee Waltz. Thankfully, the meaning of today's gospel is not found in the type of dancing, nor is it found in the fact John the Baptist was beheaded as a result of this dance.

I believe the point of this very complicated and disturbing gospel passage is the fact that King Herod, this powerful king,

was so moved by the dance, he offered this young girl half of his kingdom. King Herod was willing to give up power!

Now, this might make some of you uncomfortable, but you have to imagine that if King Herod was sexually aroused by this dance, he didn't need to give away half of his kingdom to gratify that desire. A person with the power to behead another man likely has the power to fulfill a lustful desire.

That is why I believe the focus of this gospel should be on the dance. Dancing involves losing power. Herod is so drawn into the dance that he is willing to give away an absurd amount of power, half of his kingdom, to be exact. We have to realize that someone who has amassed that much power would spend their days protecting it and not just give it away! Dancing involves losing power.

About a 1,000 years earlier, Michal, one of King David's wives, looks out the window and sees David dancing before the Lord. And in today's Old Testament lesson, we read that when Michal saw David dancing she despised him in her heart.

To understand the reasons for reaction, we have to remember that Michal witnessed David, this lowly Bethlehem shepherd, rise to become a great leader, defeating armies and avoiding death like a cat with nine lives.

David, this husband of hers, should have amounted to nothing, yet he has captured the City of Jerusalem and united the kingdom. He has acquired an immense amount of power.

Shortly after being anointed King, David brings the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, and Michal looks out of her chamber and witnesses him dancing before the Lord. Maybe David's dancing looked foolish, or perhaps he looked drunk or possessed. Again, I believe the type of dancing isn't important. The point is that David's dancing is an indicator of where he places his power and trust.

So, let me stop dancing around the subject and conclude by asking you a few questions: *What do you trust?*<sup>[1]</sup>

My question is not, "*What do you say you trust?*" Most Christians (especially those sitting in a pew) will blurt out the right answer without much thinking: *I trust in God.*

So, let me ask again: *What do you really trust?*

The answer to this question seems to be the same today as it was centuries ago. *We trust in power.* Individually and collectively, we seek to amass power because power seems to open all doors.

If I asked you *what you desire, or what it is you love*, you would probably recite the great commandment—Love God and your neighbor (Luke 10: 23).

But, my question is *what do you actually love?*

We live in a culture that above all desires to possess. Possessions offer power and promise happiness. And in pursuing our desire for possessions we live like squirrels caught on a squirrel wheel...and who wants to live like that?

The dancing in today's readings reminds us that the Christian life is about making God the object of our faith and love—not just to say *God is the object*—but to actually order our lives around trusting and loving God.

When God, rather than power, is the object of your trust...and when God, rather than possessions, is the object of your love...your kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.

You will notice the change, and the Michal's in your life will also notice the change. They will no longer look out and see you dancing for someone or something else. Instead, they will see you living a new way, living as though you are dancing before the Lord. AMEN.

[1] The final section of this sermon is taken from Miroslav Volf's "Dancing For God: Evangelical Theological Education in Global Context."

---

© *The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.*