

Sermon: Putting a Jingle in Stewardship

Year B, Proper 10

[2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19; Psalm 24; Amos 7:7-15; Psalm 85:8-13; Ephesians 1:3-14;](#)

[Mark 6:14-29](#)

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David is dancing, dancing before the LORD, dancing with all his might. (2 Samuel 6:15). Not to give Kevin Bacon a good line in a movie 3,000 years later (I brought *Footloose* with me to show the scene downstairs during coffee hour). David is dancing because he's so incredibly happy. When he left his previous gig as a shepherd boy and entered into the politics of kingship in Israel, Saul was king and not doing a very good job of it. The people of Israel had been called onto the land of Israel. But there were already people living on that land who had absolutely no interest in handing it over to the newcomers. There were traders on the coast, the Philistines, who could afford mercenaries to come in a roust anyone they felt like. When David entered politics, the people of Israel saw themselves as members of 12 tribes in a loose coalition.

David has fought as a gifted warrior, he has wept and sang as a gifted poet. He has married Saul's daughter Michal, maybe for love, but definitely for political advantage as well. Saul had multiple sons who could inherit the throne. The last surviving son was Abinadab, whose house sheltered the Ark of the Covenant for all those years. So David has outlived and outmaneuvered Saul's sons and their sons to take the throne of Israel. David has founded Jerusalem, a city on a hill. In those days, Brookline would have been considered a city, so it doesn't take a ton of inhabitants to be a city, just a concentration of wealth sufficient that you can some folks stop working as subsistence farmers, working all year to feed themselves and their families. But we all know how hard it is to save enough to give our kids four years in college, let alone producing enough to take people off the land for their whole lives.

He's accomplished an amazing thing. It may have started with him on his own, slinging that stone into Goliath's noggin. But since then he has had to lead men and influence women, he's had to show a nomadic people what it is like to fight for and to live on the land. He's had to respect a power structure, even when the head of that structure was badly flawed, as King Saul was. He's respected a tribal power structure and then built on it in subtle and not so subtle ways to convert it into a true monarchy. When we see David today, he is the King of Israel, a true king, with bureaucrats and mercenaries¹ and a capital city. So David has cause to celebrate, to dance, to sing. David has cause to do all that, full throated and open hearted.

In the fall, we'll have a stewardship campaign and we'll raise about \$50,000 or roughly half our budget from people simply saying that they're willing to give money to support the church. Think about that. That's worth a little dance. That there is something so compelling that we have done together that people are willing to take money that could go to college or retirement or renovation funds and put it to another use.

But pledges only make up about half the budget. We need to come up with the other half of the budget we need to keep things going. The take home meals provide roughly 4% of our budget. I always have a little dance in the kitchen when I eat one because invariably I'm cooking it on a

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 247.

day when I've forgotten to figure out a meal for myself. The amount they contribute to the church is amazing. Almost as amazing as they taste.

The Church Faire brings in another 6%. In one day in December, we bring in a striking amount of financial support for the church. Right after worship today, we're celebrating Christmas in July, because something that big doesn't happen all at once. We need a lot of folks to figure out how to invite other members of the community to support the work of the church. And have fun. And eat cookies. And make fun and compelling baskets for people to bid on. It takes a lot of work, so we're going to start earlier this year to make it less of a burden on the folks who organize it. That's dance worthy. Perhaps even with a jingle bell tied onto your dancing shoes. Or linen ephod. Whatever works for you.

The pledging 50% of the budget is certainly dance worthy. But the other 50%, the part where busy people who have plenty of other things to do with their time figure out how to cook meals, and offer breakfasts and spaghetti suppers and Christmas Faires, that is pretty amazing too. Because that's not just a donation of money, eggs and pasta and strawberry jam, it's also a donation of time that none of us have. It's time donated because of all the precious gifts God has given us, time may be the most precious.

I mentioned in my welcome that the Congregational denomination that is part of our church's history was one of somber, sober Puritans. We don't clap in church, we barely sing hymns. We don't prohibit dancing because no one we know is going to dance. Anywhere. Anytime. Under any condition. I come from a long line of New England Puritans, these are my people. But even I know there is a time for dancing. And what this little church accomplishes through its financial stewardship is certainly worth dancing about.

If that were the purpose of the reading today, that working together to honor the call of God is worth dancing for, then I would throw on some holy dancing music and do my white girl best to lead you all to *dance before the LORD with all our might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals* (2 Samuel 6:5). And maybe some jingle bells.

But in today's reading, there is Michal, daughter of King Saul, King David's wife, looking out her window and despising David. As you saw in the bulletin, today's passage has a gap in it. We read 2 Samuel, chapter 6, verses 1 to 5 and then skip 6 to 12a and rejoin the story at 12b and follow it to verse 19. If we're already cutting up the passage, why not cut out Michal and her window and just let David dance? He's certainly entitled to it.

You could make the argument that Saul was her father and she knew how kings were supposed to behave, which does not include public dancing.² Or that she thought stripping down to his BVDs, which is basically what a linen ephod is, was a bit much.³ On the other hand a linen ephod is what the priests wore,⁴ so maybe she thought he was crossing the line from king to priest and he should stay in his lane. Or you can take a more psychological approach. The longer Saul was in office, the more erratic he got. She may be terrified that having left her

² Brueggemann, 251.

³ J. Mary Luti, "Proper 10, Homiletical Perspective, 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19" in *Feasting on the Word: Year B Additional Essays*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012], 6.

⁴ Carol J. Dempsey, OP, "Proper 10, Exegetical Perspective, 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19" in *Feasting on the Word: Year B Additional Essays*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012], 4.

father's crazy behavior, she's now hitched herself to David who appears capable of similarly erratic behavior.⁵

Those are all reasonable readings of this passage, but I think Michal is in here because she's the individual who makes a wider trend real. Everything David has accomplished has meant life in his community has had to change. They have fought prolonged wars with their enemies. They have shifted from a nomadic to a settled, agricultural way of life. They have shifted from tribal loyalties to a monarchy. All this in a few years. David appears to be delighted with the change. He doesn't appear to acknowledge that other people are struggling with that same change.

Or worse yet, he is acknowledging that other people are struggling and he's rubbing it in their face. The Ark of the Covenant is the taproot of the religious traditions of the people of Israel.⁶ It is their symbol. Where the ark is, there God is. Apparently, it's not enough for David to have military, political, economic victories. He's claiming religious power too. He's moving the Ark. If the conservatives want to connect with the Ark, want to pray in its presence, want to be in the same place as God, they need to come to David's new city.⁷ David is going to make them acknowledge David's new world order if they want to continue a religious life that's important to them.

Put that way, you can see why Michal despises David. The dancing is just salt in the wound.

So do we dance or not? Well, is power being configured in a way that is faithful to God's call? Are we serving the poor, the weak, the widows and orphans, the foreigners in our midst, as God has called us to do? Are we loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves? If so, we dance. We dance prepared to acknowledge that for some, they liked the power configured the way it was. Maybe there were groups that were helped in the past who are not helped now. Maybe we aren't using the church's resources the way they think they should be used. Maybe the church isn't using the church's resources the way *you* think they should be used. And yet we dance. But we are aware that someone is looking out their window and despising us. That someone may be a person we've cooked meals with or carved watermelon Christmas trees with.

If we are going to do stewardship, we'd better do it to reconfigure power in this world. If we are going to reconfigure power, we'd better do it to suit God's call to the best of our ability. We have to know that discerning God's call, figuring out what to do with the power we're reconfiguring is not a simple call and that we will likely cause some people to despise us when we do it. But we have to keep going, have to keep answering the call.

At the end of today's reading, it says: *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, 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.* (2 Samuel 6:18-19). As a sign of David's conviction that his community was following God's call, he shared some of the abundance that God had given the people. He had everyone share a common meal. Good food is a hallmark of this church's stewardship.

⁵ Brueggemann, 251.

⁶ Brueggemann, 249.

⁷ Brueggemann, 248.

In emailing with Carol, I asked her if it would be possible to have something at coffee hour with raisins or dates in it. The Hebrew word that's translated *a portion of meat* could also be translated *a portion of dates*. Carol being Carol, she said, "of course." So when you have your cake of raisins today at coffee hour, when you decide what you can do to help with the Christmas Faire, think of what your efforts are doing through the church's stewardship. You are helping reconfigure power in this world, you are helping answer God's call. Maybe people will despise you for it, even people you care about. But that is stewardship. And that is worth a little shimmy, a little jingle, when you realize what is possible.