

## **What a Wonderful World**

[Texts - II Samuel 6:5-22;  
Matthew 11:16-19; 28-30]

Pastor Dave Shackle  
February 7, 2016

In this morning's Old Testament reading, my namesake - King David - dances passionately before the Ark of the Covenant, a rowdy crowd of Israelites, *and* his angry and mortified wife, Michal. David is wearing nothing but a little linen loincloth and a great big smile; which makes my beads and hat seem relatively tame. [Lucky for you, my loincloth is at the dry-cleaner!] David is dancing in a joyful celebration of Life, and as an expression of the ecstasy he feels in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant - which represents the Presence of the Holy One! Nevertheless, Michal angrily scolds David for "uncovering himself before the eyes of his maids, like some vulgar, ill-bred commoner!" So David fires-back, that as God's appointed King in Israel, he will make himself "even more undignified than this!" In other words, if David's dancing and displays of religious zeal bother Michal, then she'd better get used to it!

Now, David isn't dancing to anger his wife, nor to please her. He's not performing to impress the crowd. David dances as a way of expressing his unbridled joy, and his undying gratitude to the Holy One. And even though it raises a few eyebrows, and raises a ruckus between him and his wife, David doesn't care, because he is following his heart's passion. And his heart is telling him to dance and celebrate with everything he's got! Sometimes, when the Spirit moves you, you've just gotta sing or shout or dance for joy - regardless of how others might feel about it.

In today's New Testament reading, Jesus confronts a group of angry and mortified religious leaders who vehemently oppose his joyful and uninhibited celebration of Life. Jesus says, 'To what shall I compare you? You're like a bunch of spoiled brats who are envious and distrustful of anyone or anything that's different. We play happy flute music and you won't dance; we sing a solemn dirge and you will not

mourn. You condemn John the Baptist's serious and strict lifestyle as being demonic; yet when I come eating and drinking and enjoying life, you call me a glutton and a drunkard. There's just no pleasing you!

The problem isn't with John the Baptist, nor is it Jesus' problem. The problem is that sometimes, some people aren't satisfied unless they're being critical and negative. Yet in reality, being critically negative isn't all that satisfying! How much more fulfilling and freeing it is to be positive and open-minded - to appreciate and affirm the marvelous diversity and beauty of Life, which surrounds us every day. That's how Jesus lives - with an upbeat spirit of openness and hopefulness, wonder and joy - free from petty human judgments; yet fully human, and fully aware of the needs and concerns of those around him. Jesus takes seriously the pain and tragedy that Life can bring. Yet he also *brings* to Life a Sacred Spirit of goodness and joy, affirmation and hope; a spirit which trusts that Divine Compassion and Grace will always see us through our darkest night, and bring us into the light of a new day.

Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Much of what burdens many of the people in Jesus' day, as well as today, is a heavy-handed religious establishment that pushes people down, and puts God "way up there" - as a distant, dreadful judge who's just waiting for you to make a mistake. And as we know, it's extremely hard to live fully or joyfully, when we're preoccupied with the fear of doing something wrong! So Jesus invites us all to see and experience the Holy One in a wholly different light - as One who gives us this wonderful gift of Life and then asks only, that we lovingly share it with one another - fully and fairly, openly and joyfully!

Of course, Life isn't always joyful. It consists of ups and downs, good times and bad, pleasure and pain, triumphs and tragedies. This is why it's so important that we celebrate those precious moments when things are going well, so that we have something good to remember

and to help carry us through those difficult times which *will* come. Actor and author Orson Wells once said, "If you want a happy ending, that depends, of course, on where you stop your story." That's a rather profound observation! "If you want a happy *ending*, that depends, of course, on where you *stop* your story." Fortunately for us, the Divine Author - the One who sets this whole Story in motion - is good and wise, caring and compassionate. So regardless of the terrible twists and turns we encounter - or that we ourselves impose upon the Narrative - Life's compelling impulse will inevitably bring us back to the Light and Love from which we all emanate.

Jesus believes this with his whole heart. He trusts it with his entire life! That's why he is able to live freely, fully and faithfully. That's what gives him the unshakable confidence to stand-up and speak-out for all that is good and true, wholesome and holy. If his associating with people who society and religion deem "unacceptable" makes others uncomfortable, then so be it! If trouble comes from his insisting that the Holy Source of Life cares more about helping and healing people's broken lives, than about pietistic rules and rituals, then that's a price Jesus is willing to pay. Jesus lives his life - even gives his life - for the ultimate joy of bringing people together with one another and with their One Divine Source!

This morning, you and I will share together the Life-Affirming Bread and Cup of Holy Communion. We do this to remember and celebrate the wonderful life of Jesus Christ:

The One who isn't afraid to breathe new life into stuffy religious traditions.

The One who reminds us that the Holy One who creates us all, truly does love and welcome us all!

The One who willingly lays down his life - trusting that the Sacred Source of All Things, really does have the final say!

With the dawning of Easter morning, the world is given a glorious sign that pain and suffering, darkness and death, shall not prevail.

Therefore, there is nothing in Life, or Death, to fearfully hold us back!

This is the Good News that sets us free, and which inspires us all to sing and dance and shout for joy!