

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Shall We Dance?"  
Dr. J. Dent

July 12, 2009  
Proper 10

A few years ago, my wife Lynn and I took ballroom dancing lessons. It was good. We learned foxtrot, jive, waltz, cha-cha and some others. The dancing we did was mainly at weddings, but it was good to learn some of the more formal dances. Dancing had become a kind of individualistic thing in the later 60s, 70s and 80s. Now with hip hop and rap, and a different styles of music again, dancing is changing still. There was a time when you needed lessons to dance. And in most of the folk dancing, including the dancing done here in the Hall by various groups, lessons are given.

Dancing is about two people learning to work together, to feel the music together, and it used to be a way to get to know people. For many it still is.

Dancing is not the first activity that comes to mind when you say the word "Presbyterian," although we as a denomination have never had an anti-dance policy that I am aware of. In fact, the dance is found in some of our churches in a liturgical form. It is also a symbol of working out a relationship to mutual satisfaction. So we can talk about the dance of parents with their children. And how important it is for parents to know when to lead, set up rules and discipline, and when to let go and befriend their child. So often the phases of this dance get out of sync and we try to befriend our children too early, and then try to impose order and rules when it is too late.

Dancing can be seen as the relationship between the Lord and the Church; accepting Jesus' lead and following what we have received over centuries as the core tenets, attitudes and behaviour of Christians. If we don't accept this lead, the dance is awkward, stumbling, and painful as feet get stepped on. You can even fall and break something if you don't agree to your part in the dancing relationship.

Dance partners work toward a mutual goal. Leaders and followers in the church are also in a constant kind of dance. We seek to serve and help the Church and the individuals of the church to move forward in their relationship with God. Sometimes that dance gets off a bit as well as we

need to ask forgiveness and start over together, to find the rhythm of God's music together.

If you've ever been in a ballroom type of setting, you know that one of the key things to learn is to be able to lead and to be able to follow appropriately. It's not mainly about control, at least I don't think it is, but rather about being willing to follow even though you might be able to lead better and strongly leading, even though sometimes you might feel like following. When there is no confusion, and where there is mutual agreement, often two people get to experience a wonderful thing together, and with experience, even those around the couple can appreciate watching them dance. Indeed, many movies have been made from the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers era to the music videos and Bollywood movies of today.

In the Bible readings, two dances were presented to us today. One was the dance of Herodias' daughter. She had been the wife of Herod's brother Philip. And John the Baptist had often spoke about it not being right for Herod to have his brother's wife as his own. To complicate things, when Herod threw a big party, he invited Herodias' daughter, presumably Salome, Herodias' daughter by Philip, who danced in a "pleasing way" before his step father. It doesn't take too much imagination to figure out the sensual and lascivious nature of this act, with Herod saying she could ask for as much as half his kingdom. Since the daughter asked her mother what to ask for then that was the end of John the Baptist. Even though Herod had probably had too much to drink, he still knew this was wrong, but because of his public promises, he gave in. This was a dance causing murder, and not a dance that led to praising God.

On the other hand, David was a person after God's heart, now reversing the policies of the previous government. He desired to have the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence, moved to Jerusalem. And on this occasion, he danced before the Lord with all his might, so much so, that his wife Michal, found what he did detestable. Not so much because he didn't have all his usual robes on, but rather because he was king and was dancing with the common people before the Lord. You have to remember as well that Michal had been given to another man by Saul, after David fell out of favour with Saul. So there were a few complicated things going in their relationship. But David strongly made the case that he danced before God to God's glory and not to please people. Just as when we come to worship, we are here to worship God, and that must be our first focus, more than the

preacher, more than the music, more than everything else that draws us to church. The point in David's dance is that the dance was to restore and reinforce relationship with God, and so it was the opposite of what Herodias' daughter did.

In the Bible, the dance is neither evil nor good. It is simply a part of life, and when it is used appropriately and experienced to build up God's ways, it is a wonderful gift.

We too are called once again to dance with the Lord, just as the author of the Psalms was called to do. The Lord holds out his hand to us to respond. I trust that we might be bold enough to let him guide us, lead us, move us in his direction and with all that he has for us.

Let us pray.