

DANCING AGAINST THE SYSTEM

(2 Samuel 6; Mark 6: 14-29)

Both of the scripture lessons that were read into our hearing this morning have a lot to do with the *art* and the *power* and the *expressiveness*—as well as the *purpose*—of *dance*.

There was a black American woman named Pearl Primus, a 20th century anthropologist, dancer and choreographer who helped introduce African dance to American audiences. She seemed to put all that art and power and expressiveness and purpose of dance in perspective, when she left us this quote: *“The dance is strong magic. The dance is a spirit. It turns the body to liquid steel. It makes (the body) vibrate like a guitar. The body can fly without wings. It can sing without voice. The dance is strong magic.”*

That certainly seems to be the case with the two examples of dancing that we have before us this morning. In 2 Samuel, David is praise-dancing with all his might before the Lord, and there is no doubt in my

mind that this dancing comes out of his own African spiritual heritage, and the African spiritual influences that were all around him. Lest we forget that most of the biblical story takes place on what was then part of the African continent, we can be reminded that dancing and movement and spirit possession have always been integral parts of African spirituality. David seems to be very influenced by those traditions and rhythms as he presides over the bringing to Jerusalem of the Ark of the Covenant—the most precious Israelite religious symbol of its time—solidifying both his *religious* as well as his *political* power among the people of Israel. If we—like probably most of those who were watching—believe the sincerity of David’s praise dance, and held it up as a demonstration of the anointing of the Spirit, then we can be led to say, *what a difference a dance can make!*

The other example of the art and power and expressiveness and purpose of dance that we have before us today is a very different story of the difference that a dance can make. According to Mark’s story—

which, by the way, is not corroborated by anyone else who wrote about this subject—John the Baptist, in his usual prophetic fashion, did not hesitate to tell King Herod how he broke religious law by marrying Herodias, the ex-wife of his brother. You see, the brother was still alive, and the Law of Moses says you have to at least wait until your brother is *dead* before you marry his ex-wife. So, Herod got upset, and put John in prison, but didn't have the heart to kill him because John was a holy man.

Unlike Herod, his wife Herodias didn't get upset. She got MAD, and pretty much made up her mind that she was going to make sure that John the Baptist ended up a dead man. How DARE he even comment on the lives and loves of royalty, she must have thought. That is WAY above his pay-grade!

So, one day when Herod gave himself a birthday party and invited his whole court, and when everyone was good and drunk, the daughter of Herodias used dance to make a difference. The word picture that we

are given in this story does not imply that she was overcome by the Spirit of the Lord as she danced; more like the spirit of "*May I please the court?*" To me the picture implies more that she was overcome by the spirit of the "strong magic" of the dance—that spirit that Pearl Primus made reference to. Those are spirits and rhythms that also come out of the movement and expressions of African spirituality—and even African sexuality.

Well, the girl danced so well, so provocatively, that Herod made a drunken oath to her to give her in return whatever she wanted. And her mother told her to tell him that the head of John the Baptist on a silver platter would do just fine.

II.

No doubt, a lot can be said about these two stories that have dance at the center of them. But I want to briefly look at the two stories from the perspective of what they tell us can happen when—instead of us dancing in STEP with the system, we dance AGAINST the system.

What do I mean by dancing?

I mean that we are all presently on an earthly life journey. We are spiritual beings having a temporary physical experience here on this earth, and what we do while we are here I am calling this morning our own *dance*. And what we dance *to* while we are here is the rhythm of our own music. Some of us dance over in the corners of life, by ourselves, and prefer to be. Others of us like to dance in groups, in lines, in flash mobs, doing the steps that are going to keep us dancing with others; maybe even dancing FOR others. And if we decide to seriously spend our lives dancing not only for *ourselves*, but also for *others*, we are eventually going to be *dancing against the system*.

Because the system doesn't really dance for others. The system usually only dances for itself.

We have two examples today of how that system works.

We will look at the first example through the eyes of Michal, who appears in the story in 2 Samuel as one of David's wives. As David is dancing, practically naked save for a linen cloth around his waist (which probably didn't stay put very well), Michal is looking at him out of a castle window, disgusted at what she sees as the inappropriate show that David, the King mind you, is putting on in front of the whole kingdom—but ESPECIALLY in front of the servant girls! Michal confronts her husband—her husband who had just made himself the most powerful person in Israel, btw. In effect, she *dances against the system*, a system that she had played along with and acquiesced to all her life. Despite the fact that she was the daughter of the former king, she was a woman treated like property; first given to David, then taken from David and given to someone else as punishment to David, then

given back to David in a political marriage agreement. Earlier in the scriptures, in 1 Samuel, the narrator of the Samuel stories implied that she once loved David, but now it seems that love has grown cold. The narrator of the story doesn't fill in any blanks for us concerning the reasons for the loss of love. But the scriptures do tell us that when Michal, for whatever reason, danced against the system—even the system that was embodied by her husband—she was pretty much banished by David until the day of her death.

And as we look further at the dangers of dancing against the system through the eyes and lens of John the Baptist, we see a man seeking to fulfill his prophetic calling by speaking the word of God in the public square, and not sparing those who are considered to be in high esteem—even the king and queen themselves! Even as unique as John's dance was, and as the music that John danced *to* was, John

danced against the system, out of step, to a different tune—and the system imprisoned him.

And then, because of the flirtatious dance of someone else, a someone that John may not have even known; because of the insensitivity of a king who more valued a drunken promise than a human life, John was killed.

Because the dance that the Spirit directed him to dance, was a *dance against the system*.

III.

No doubt the death of John the Baptist affected Jesus very deeply. It was after John's arrest by Herod that Jesus declared the beginning of his public ministry, as we are told in Mark chapter 1. Even at a time when the current climate was dangerous for those who danced to a dissenting tune; even at a time when Jesus knew full well the danger of obeying the Spirit of God rather than the system of Caesar, Jesus declared his public ministry, and began preaching and teaching a gospel

of love, justice and peace. Love, justice and peace go against the status quo, go against the system. But that's the direction that the dance steps of Jesus moved him—right up against the system that could've cared less about God's people.

I've been sent here to remind you today, that the mission of the church of Jesus Christ is STILL to preach truth to power, to teach love, justice and peace to the status quo, and to dance against the system that does not consider all of God's people as holy.

We are called to dance against the systems that separate refugee children from their families, then claim they can't find where they put them.

We are called to dance against the systems that kill and incarcerate black men with impunity.

We are called to dance against the systems that disregard and dismiss the sexuality of others, while calling for their own sexuality to be highly regarded and acknowledged.

We are called to dance against the systems that treat black children as though they are the least valuable thing in the world.

We are called to dance against the systems that make it a law that we are not to share with one another, not to provide food or clothing or shelter or healthcare to one another, not to pursue justice for one another, not to love one another.

We are called to dance against the systems that stigmatize each other's religion, and culture, and traditions, and heritage, and that make nationalism instead of globalism the order of the day.

And we are called to the dance—just like Jesus—knowing full well that dancing up against the system can get you killed, maimed, incarcerated, banished, made to be invisible, disrespected, fired, blackballed, *persona non grata*...

But Jesus showed us what the cross is all about, and what pain is all about, and what suffering is all about, and what death is all about.

Concerning death, Jesus showed us that it was not the last word!

Therefore Jesus also showed us what NEW LIFE is all about.

What courage . . .

What passion . . .

What truth . . .

What purpose . . .

What calling . . .

What joy . . .

Dancing against the systems that move against the life of God's people,
is the dance that we as followers of Jesus are supposed to be dancing.

Let us find our ways to use the "*strong magic of the dance*" in some
very real and creative ways; so we can dance on until victory is won!

Amen.

