

“Afraid of Looking Foolish”

2 Samuel 6:12-23, Mark 6:14-29

Proper 10B, July 12, 2015

Dear friend, how about you? Have you ever been afraid of looking foolish?

Psychologists tell us that most of probably have been and still are at times. Perhaps that's why you were afraid to raise your hand and answer your **teacher's questions** way back in the fourth grade! What if the answers you gave were wrong? What would everyone else in the classroom think of you then? Perhaps that's why **some of you guys** never got around to asking out that one special girl, you admired so much, on a date when you were in high school. What if she said, **“No!”**? Were you afraid of looking foolish back then?

Well let me say initially that there is a common theme in both our Old Testament and our Gospel lessons today! King David having just celebrated what must have been one of the **best days of his entire life is accused by his wife Michal of having made a fool of himself!** And St. Mark teaches us in our Gospel lesson today that the **greatest cause behind the martyrdom of John the Baptist, lies in the fact that King Herod was afraid of looking foolish in the eyes of his guests** by renegeing on a promise that he had just made publically to Salome!

The words of our Old Testament lesson this morning (2 Samuel 6:12-23) share with us a very defining moment in the life of King David! For it was on this day that he was leading thousands of Israelites in a glorious procession, **bringing the Ark of the Covenant into the Holy City Jerusalem.** And in this action, David was declaring that not only would Jerusalem be the political center of Israel but the spiritual headquarters of Israel too!

There was much cause to celebrate! There was much cause for dancing!

The long Civil War between David and Saul was now ended; with thousands of many casualties in that war; thousands wounded and thousands having paid the ultimate sacrifice as fallen soldiers on the battlefield; among them was Saul and his beloved son Jonathan, David's best and dearest friend!

And now the Philistines have been defeated too, though in a previous battle they had captured the Ark of the Covenant; that ancient ark that they housed in the Philistine city of **Ashdod.** In an attempt to ridicule the **God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** they placed that Ark of the Covenant **in a pagan temple before a statue of their false god Dagon!** But on the next day, they awoke from their sleep only to discover that the statue of Dagon had fallen facedown before the Ark of the Covenant, with its head and hands completely severed from its body!

In the subsequent weeks and months that followed, many people in Philistia were stricken with tumors and all sorts of illnesses (I Samuel 5:6-7); occurrences that they attributed to the judgment of the God of Israel upon them. And so, by this time, **they were more than happy to give that ancient Ark of the Covenant back to the Israelites; that ancient Ark, God had instructed Moses to build some 400 years prior to this in the Exodus event; a wooden box covered with gold; 3 feet, 9 inches long, 3 feet, 2 inches high, and 3 feet, 2 inches wide.** On top of the Ark there were “two cherubim” also made of gold. The top of the ark became known as the **“Mercy Seat.”** Inside of it, had been placed the **two tablets of stone on which God had given to Moses the Ten Commandments, a bowl of manna and Aaron's rod.**

The Ark of the Covenant was, at the time the highest emblem, manifesting for the people of Israel the very real presence and glory of God! As David was leading that procession, we read in the Bible that there was **great merriment among the people. David and the people were dancing and singing songs and playing musical instruments: lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals (2 Samuel 6:5).**

David was so humbled and grateful for the day that he had taken off his royal garments, and was wearing only a linen ephod; a garment usually worn only by the priests, but on the outside of their other clothing. David was wearing his linen ephod, it seems only over a loin cloth though the Bible doesn't say this specifically! We do know that David was scantily clothed.

Let's remember that David was relatively young in that day, a military hero; whose physical appearance must have been also something to behold! David wasn't embarrassed! David wasn't ashamed! David wasn't afraid of looking foolish! David was so full of the Holy Spirit and so caught up in the joyful celebration of that day, that he didn't want his other clothing to constrict his vigorous movements and great gyrations in the rendering of his whole-hearted thanks and praise to God! David was simply in his own way doing what Paul, centuries later, commands us all to do in Romans 12:1, "*Present your whole bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God!*"

David was not dancing to put on a show or to entertain the bystanders. His actions were not for pleasing people but for pleasing God. And at the end of the day's events, we read in our Old Testament lesson today that "*David blessed all of the people, the whole multitude of Israel, men and women, with a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins to each one. Then all the people departed, each to his house!*" (2 Samuel 6:18-19)

There is only **one party-pooper there that day that the Biblical writer tells us about and this was David's wife, named Michal**, the daughter of King Saul and the sister of Jonathan. As she looked out of her third-story window as the procession was entering into her view, the Bible also tells us today that in response to David and his actions: "*She despised him in her heart!*" (V. 16)

Little did David know this until he walked into his home when his wife Michal comes out to greet him sarcastically saying: "*How the King of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' female servants, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncovers himself*" (v. 20)!

Of course David had some rather uncomplimentary words to say to Michal in response: "*It was before the LORD, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the LORD that I have danced before the LORD*" (v. 21)! Then David says to his wife in a very real sense: "But girlfriend, you haven't seen anything yet!" David's exact words are: "*I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in my own eyes; but by the maids of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor!*" And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death" (2 Samuel 6:23)!

This last verse is probably not nearly so much about God's judgment upon David's wife for her reaction, but an expression of David's unwillingness to sleep with her ever again! And certainly, by this time, David had already taken for himself many wives!

As I was studying the appointed Scripture lessons for this day, I saw some powerful correlations between the Old Testament lesson and our Gospel lesson today! Both passages tell us about **two kings, two dances and two different reactions on the part of people for those dances having taken place!**

Here's the message God gave to me from these Bible readings today: WE NEVER NEED TO BE AFRAID OF LOOKING FOOLISH BECAUSE OF OUR SUPREME DEVOTION TO GOD! BUT WE ALWAYS DO WELL TO BE AFRAID OF LOOKING FOOLISH BECAUSE OF OUR SUPREME DEVOTION ONLY TO OURSELVES!

But just think of all those people in the Bible who were not afraid of looking foolish because of their supreme devotion to God! Noah looked foolish, building an ark in the middle of the desert. Sarah looked foolish buying maternity clothes at ninety. The Israelites looked foolish, marching round the walls of Jericho while blowing trumpets. David looked foolish challenging Goliath with a slingshot. The Wise Men looked foolish following a wandering star. Peter looked foolish stepping out of the boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee one night. And Jesus looked foolish hanging naked on the cross!

And the results speak for themselves, don't they? Noah was saved from the flood. Sarah gave birth to Isaac. The walls of Jericho came tumbling down. David defeated Goliath. The Wise Men found the Messiah. Peter walked on water. And Jesus rose from the dead.

But please let me make one further observation. **When you get excited about God don't expect everybody else to automatically get excited about God around you to the same degree! When the Holy Spirit turns up the BTU's underneath you, it disrupts the status quo.** Some people will be inspired by what God is doing in your life. Others, unfortunately, not so much so!

In our Gospel lesson, "King Herod," the son of Herod the Great also known as Herod Antipas threw a gigantic birthday party in honor of himself. And as the grand finale to the evening's celebration, like the grand finale at a Fourth of July fireworks' display, the daughter of Herodias, named Salome, was invited to dance!

Dance, she did, but not in the same manner of which we see David dancing in our Old Testament lesson. Her dancing was much more closely aligned to what the 1987 box office hit labeled as **"Dirty Dancing,"** starring **Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey!**

King Herod is turned on! Many of his invited guests are turned on! And because of his supreme devotion to himself—in wanting to be admired and loved by others—he stood up and made a grand gesture to this talented-young girl named Salome, by saying: "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you, up to one-half of my kingdom!" (Mark 6:22).

You remember how through a private consultation with her mother, she ended up asking for the head of John the Baptist, which Herod promptly serves up to her on a platter! He didn't want to do this, but he was afraid of looking foolish!

Brothers and sisters, may I say it again this morning? **We don't need to be afraid of looking foolish because of our complete devotion to our God, but there are times when we would do well to be afraid of looking foolish because of our complete devotion to ourselves!** And friends, there are numerous stories throughout **the Bible when a man or a woman of faith was more than willing to risk looking foolish in the eyes of the world because of their deep love and supreme devotion to God.**

One example that comes to mind for me is that marvelous story in **Luke 7, where Jesus had been invited to the home of a Pharisee named Simon to a dinner party, together with his disciples.** When they are seated outside on the deck, in the cool of the evening, as dessert is being served, this uninvited woman barges her way onto the deck, and she pours an expensive alabaster flask of ointment on Jesus' feet that she then washes with her tears and dries with her beautiful long hair! And **Simon protests her willingness to looking foolish that evening because of her great devotion to God!**

"If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner!" And Jesus replied, *"Simon, I have something to say to you: A certain moneylender had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both! Now which of them will love him more?"* Simon answered, *"The one I suppose for whom he cancelled the larger debt!"*

"You have answered rightly, Jesus said. Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many are forgiven—for she loved much! But he, who is forgiven little, loves little!" And he said to her, *"Your sins are forgiven!"* Then those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, *"Who is this, who even forgives sins?"* And he said to the woman, *"Your faith has saved you; go in peace!"* (Luke 7:36-50)

One of the great fools in the history of the church was Francis of Assisi, who lived at the end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13 centuries, from 1181-1226! During the course of his ministry, Francis of Assisi did many odd things which offended the sensibility of the respectable folks of Assisi. **For instance, as David stripped off his clothes he sometimes literally stripped off his own clothes to a poor person who had none!** But perhaps the strangest thing about Francis; the thing that offended the respectable sensibilities of the people of Assisi most, was his great love of the lepers when he would see one beside the road! Doing the unthinkable thing, Francis would go to them, kneel down, take them into his arms and kiss them...on the lips and on their sores. **But it wasn't always this way. St. Bonaventure who wrote the biography of Francis tells us that when Francis was a young man he was known for loving people and being generous. But there was one group of people he could not love...it was the lepers. Their disfigurement made his skin crawl. The smell of their soars turned his stomach. He did not want to minister to them.**

But one day while Francis was praying, he beheld a vision of Christ crucified on the cross. And as he looked at Christ, he realized the depth of God's love for him. And when he looked at the wounds of Christ, there Francis saw, at long last, the blood of Jesus that was also actually being shed for him. And this changed the way he looked at the lepers. **From now on, when he saw a leper in their wounds he saw Christ's wounds, and in their suffering, he saw Christ's passion because he saw the**

wounds of the lepers as Christ's wounds he was able to love the lepers as his brothers, as people loved by God.

David, the unnamed woman in the house of Simon, and Francis of Assisi were all fools; fools for Christ, who were willing to make spectacles of themselves **in front of society. They were dancing fools because they showed to the world their ecstatic love for Christ and so did not care, if or when, the world called them fools.** You know, there is something disturbing about encountering a fool, disturbing because you're not quite sure if this fool is out of his mind or if the fool knows something that we don't.

Brothers and sisters, we are fools for Christ, St. Paul tells us in I Corinthians 4:10!

For all the beauty of the music, for all the dignity of this building, for all the pageantry of this worship, we are fools because **we proclaim that God is good and the world still has evil in it. Because we proclaim that a man was killed; 3 days later, God raised him from the dead, and so God will raise us from the dead.** In the eyes of the world, for all our respectability, the world thinks we are fools. So, let us be fools, but let us be dancing fools whose joyful service of the world will make them ask, are we just fools, or do they know something that we do not know? Amen