

“Afraid of Looking Foolish”

2 Samuel 6:12-23, Mark 6:14-29, July 15, 2018

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 afraid of looking foolish, at times!

And maybe that's why you were always reluctant, as a child, to raise your hand to answer the teacher's question when you were in fourth grade! On top of that, unlike all those "extroverted" people out there in the world, who loved drawing attention to themselves, you were then and still are today much more of an "introvert" in your personality.

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 back into the Holy City Jerusalem.

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

Why? Because the long civil war between David and Saul was now ended; though unfortunately Saul and his son Jonathan, David's best and dearest friend, had been slain in battle!

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

David was so humbled and grateful for the arrival of this triumphant day---that he had taken off his royal garments, and was wearing only a linen ephod; a garment usually worn by the priest, but on the outside of their other clothing.

David was wearing this linen ephod; a very thin garment, almost sheer in its appearance; but 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 that day, that he didn't want other clothing constricting his vigorous movements and great gyrations before God in the rending of his great thanks and abundant praise to the Almighty One!

But please understand: 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 was only one party-pooper there that day that the Biblical writer tells us about: 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)

As I was studying the appointed Scripture lesson for this day, I saw some powerful correlations between the Old Testament lesson and our Gospel lesson today! Both passages from the Bible tell us about two kings, and two dances, and two different reactions that took place in response to those dances being given.

For me the real message I derived from these appointed Scripture lessons today is that: **WE NEVER NEED TO BE AFRAID OF LOOKING FOOLISH BECAUSE OF OUR SUPREME DEVOTION TO GOD!**

BUT WE DO WELL TO BECOME CAUTIOUS OF LOOKING FOOLISH BECAUSE OF OUR DEVOTION ONLY TO OURSELVES!

Have you ever been afraid of looking foolish, because of your deep 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, blowing trumpets.

As a boy, 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. But none of these things can even begin to compare with how foolish Jesus looked, while hanging totally naked, on a cross to bring us the forgiveness of our sins and to reconcile us to his Heavenly Father whom he came to reveal to us!

Nevertheless, Noah was saved from the flood. Sarah did give birth to Isaac. The walls of Jericho did come tumbling down and the Wise Men found Jesus...but even far more profoundly: **JESUS OF NAZARETH ROSE AGAIN ON THE THIRD DAY FROM THE GRAVE.**

In our Gospel lesson today, “King” Herod, as St. Mark also refers to him, though he was not really a king at all but simply the tetrarch of Galilee; himself personally demanded that his constituency address him as “king;” as King Herod!

This was not a man who lived with any kind of devotion to the LORD God of Israel at all, but only lived with a supreme devotion to himself.

Herod, therefore, was a man who, most always, did things to excesses!

He threw a birthday party for himself. And as the grand finale to the evening’s celebration, like the grand finale of a fireworks display on the Fourth of July fireworks’ exposition, 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.

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).

And through a consultation with her mother Herodias, who despised John the Baptist, for denouncing her and Herod’s sin—the young girl asks for the head of John the Baptist!

Because this ruthless demagogue, Herod, was afraid of looking foolish, he even sins against his own conscience, with what a little bit of conscience he had left, and serves up the gory head of John the Baptist on a platter!

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!

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 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