

Dancing before the Lord 2 Samuel 6:12-23

Disclaimer: Material from this message was adapted in part from messages found on the Sermon Central website.

In today's story we find two contrasting attitudes that impact how we worship God. We see David passionately, shamelessly, dancing in worship before God, while his wife Michal critically watches; "*despising her husband in her heart.*" Now I realize that dancing isn't a common part of Presbyterian worship, but I do believe that from this story we can learn a vital lesson about real worship.

The sad truth is that in many churches the worship service is often a battleground where Christians fight over style and music. See if you recognize any of these questions:

- Are we contemporary or traditional?
- Are we organ or band?
- Are we old or new?
- Are we formal or informal?
- Are we happy & clappy or reserved?

Anything familiar to you?



Yet I believe, in this church at least, we have learned that these are all irrelevant distinctions because the real question is, **do you worship or do you watch?**

Michal was just watching – while everyone else was worshipping, she remained a spectator. Preoccupied with who she was – a king's daughter, a king's wife – Michal didn't want to look foolish, getting "carried away" in worship. Her common mistake was in thinking that the act of worship is about us when it's really all about God.

She dramatically missed the understanding that

Real worship is about letting go of your "self" and being fully aware of God;

something we can do whether in loud contemporary worship, more traditional worship, Taizé, Iona, or just solitary meditation. Worship has nothing to do with style and everything to do with what is going on in our hearts.

But, first let's review this story of David dancing the Ark into Jerusalem, then we will get back to this idea of "worship versus watching."

David was "*a man after God's own heart,*" he was whole heartedly dedicated to worshipping and serving the Lord. Now as king, David passionately wanted to lead all of Israel back to God. His solution was to bring the long neglected Ark of the Covenant – the very symbol of God's presence – to his new capital Jerusalem where he could

once again establish the Ark and the sacrificial ministry of God's priests as central to Israel's daily life.

His first attempt at bringing the Ark to its new home had come to a tragic halt because, failing to transport the Ark according to God's specific directions, a person had died.

But now, properly carrying the Ark on poles on the shoulders of priests, with other priests giving thank offerings to the Lord, and with all the musicians he could find making music, along with 30,000 of Israel's leaders celebrating and rejoicing, David victoriously led the Ark into Jerusalem; "*dancing before the Lord with all his might.*"

Placing the Ark in a new tent, he then appointed priests to resume offering sacrifices to God, others to play music before the Lord, and more others to also sing songs for the Lord – songs that he had written (Psalm 106 & 95). He then brought this massive celebration to a close, blessing the people and sending every person in Israel home with a loaf of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. This was a historic day never to be forgotten as the beginning of a religious revival for Israel.

Exhausted and overjoyed with the success of the day, David returned home to bless his own household only to face scornful derision from his first wife.

Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself before the eyes of his servants' maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!" (6:20).

His face probably burning with the shame Michal was pouring over him, nevertheless David's reply showed that his heart was still right with God. David answered,

"It was before the Lord, who chose ... to appoint me as prince over Israel ... that I have danced; before the Lord. 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." (2 Samuel 6:21-23)

David replied that he had not been dancing for his own pleasure or for anyone else's approval. David was shamelessly dancing in praise of the Lord. Since this act of worship had nothing to do with himself and everything to do with God, he refused to be embarrassed.

Still, her criticism must have stung deeply. There was a time when Michal had loved David and he loved her, but with that remark their marriage died; afterwards, she remained his wife in name only. Scripture records that Michal never had a child by David.

Now before we go on to the application of this story, let's clear up one Hollywood imposed misconception about the event. Michal's remarks about David "*shamelessly uncovering himself;*" would lead one to think that he had stripped down almost naked,

which is how Richard Gere portrayed David in the movie: wearing only what looked like an oversized diaper.

But First Chronicles records **that like all the other Levitical priests, David was wearing a robe of fine linen over which was placed a sort of priestly garment: a *Linen ephod*** (6:27). Michal's derisive remarks about David "uncovering" himself meant, that in her opinion, David wasn't acting royal; he wasn't wearing anything to distinguish himself as the king. In Michal's eyes, David was looking and acting like just another servant, which made David's reply about his willingness to be *more abased in his own eyes* even more profound.

David was worshipping God simply as a servant of God, not as King David. David wasn't "watching" what he was doing – worrying about how people might judge "the king." By removing his royal robes and dressing like other worshippers, he had completely and intentionally given himself over only to praise for the Lord. And he would still gladly do even more; whatever was needed to lose his "self" in worship. No amount of abuse from Michal was going to take that joy of worship from him.

Michal had accused David of shamefully making himself look foolish before his subjects. I think deep down inside, all of us of us are afraid of looking foolish.

According to one poll, what people fear the most is "speaking in public." Their second fear is death! That means that most people would rather die than speak in public. Why? The fear of looking foolish! It's the curse of self-consciousness.

- It's that fear of foolishness that keeps us from raising our hand in the fourth grade because what if our answer is wrong.
- It's the fear of foolishness that keeps us from asking someone out on a date because what if they say no.
- It's the fear of foolishness that keeps us from changing majors or changing jobs.
- It's the fear of foolishness that keeps us from praying for a miracle or sharing our faith.
- And it's the fear of foolishness that keeps us from worshipping God the way we could and should.

But here's the secret: **if you aren't willing to look foolish especially in your worship of God, you are foolish!**

Here is a unique definition of faith:

faith is the willingness to look foolish.

- Noah looked foolish building an ark in the desert.
- Sarah looked foolish buying maternity clothes at ninety.

- The Israelites looked foolish marching around Jericho blowing trumpets.
- David looked foolish attacking Goliath with a slingshot.
- The Wise Men looked foolish following yonder star.
- Peter looked foolish stepping out of the boat in the middle of the lake in the middle of the night.
- And Jesus looked very foolish hanging unclothed on the cross.

But that's faith. Faith is the willingness to look foolish in the eyes of the faithless.

- 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 – at least for a bit.
- And Jesus rose from the dead.

Do you know why some of us have never killed a giant or walked on water? It's because we were not willing to look foolish. We're not willing to attack a giant with a slingshot or get out of the boat in the middle of the lake.

David's dance before the Lord reveals why God used him in such historic ways. He has just been crowned the King of Israel. He has defeated the Philistines. He has captured the fortress city of Jerusalem making it his new capital and now he's restoring the Ark of Covenant to its place of prominence in the life of Israel. This was the proudest day of his life and yet David never forgot who he was – a servant of God. In his worship, David shamelessly gave all the glory over to God, keeping nothing for himself: his own honor, his own prestige. Safe up there in the house window, wrapped in her own self-interest, rather than joining the dance Michal merely watched and completely missed out on perhaps the greatest worship event in the history of Israel.

So take note:

**When you get excited about God
don't expect everybody to get excited
about your excitement.**

When the Holy Spirit lights a fire within you it disrupts the status quo. When the Spirit filled disciples joyously tumbled out the doors on Pentecost morning wanting to share the good news of God, people dismissed them as being drunk.

Some people will be inspired by what God is doing in your life. Others will be convicted. And they will mask their personal conviction by finding something to criticize. Quite

often, criticism is a defense mechanism. We criticize in others what we don't like about ourselves!

Michal said *"How the king of Israel honored himself today, shamelessly uncovering himself before the eyes of his servants' maids."*

And yet in his "uncovering," in removing his royal robes David was refusing to find his identity and security in his position as king. He found his identity and security in God. As he wrote in many of his Psalms, *"The Lord is my refuge."* *"The Lord is my shepherd."* *"The Lord is my shield."* For these reasons, David wasn't afraid of looking foolish; he could not be shamed in worship!

There is a powerful scene in Rocky III. Where Rocky is getting soft. He is getting cultured. He has achieved success and he loses the fire. His manager, Mick, says, *"But then the worst thing happened that could happen to any fighter, you got civilized."*

When I read the gospels, the only civilized people I see are the priests and the Pharisees. Evidently, Jesus wasn't very impressed with civility. In fact, it seems that Jesus preferred disciples who were undomesticated. We see Jesus lambasting the Pharisees and praising a prostitute who doesn't know any better than to crash a party and pour an Alabaster jar of perfume on his feet as an act of worship.

I don't think God cares about outward appearance at all! It doesn't matter whether you are wearing royal robes or servant's garb. What God is looking for is people who are desperate enough, shameless enough, to climb sycamore trees and cut holes in ceilings and push through crowds, yell at the top of their voices, and jump out of boats to get to him!

One of the Hebrew words worship is "hallal." It means *to shine; hence, to make a show, to boast; to be (clamorously) foolish*. I love that. In other words, if you aren't willing to look foolish you aren't worshipping!

On a human plane, worship is foolish isn't it? Singing to someone you can't see! Praying and raising hands to someone you can't touch. But stop and think about it.

On our last cruise they held several events billed as "silent disco." Couples were dancing together, but each person was wearing headphones with the option of listening to three or four DIFFERENT sound tracks. The same couple, could be dancing completely out of synch with their partner yet very much in synch with others elsewhere in the room. Those dancing were having a blast, but to those watching – and I definitely was a watcher here – they looked very foolish.

There is an old proverb: *"Those who do not hear the music think the dancer is mad."*

That was what was happening in David's parade. He heard the music. Michal didn't. I imagine that if we could tune into heaven's frequency and hear the angels singing God's praises, it would lift us off our feet. We would dance like David and I am sure that others would think us foolish – or crazy.

The greatest freedom in the world is having nothing to prove. Instead of trying to prove who he was as the king of Israel, David was embracing who God is as the King of Kings. David took off his royal robes. That's a picture of worship.

Worship is disrobing. It's completely exposing ourselves to God. It's also the recognition that it's not about what we can do for God. It's not about our "royal robes," it's about what God has done for us.

Everyone who has raised children can tell their own "naked baby" stories of the toddler gleefully streaking through the house or across the yard; no shame, no inhibitions. While my children, Megan and Forrester, were young, whenever we went camping, they wore the family uniform: gym shorts and a t-shirt, and when they were paddling the canoe or just running around camp, that shirt often came off. I have a precious photo of us enjoying a lazy afternoon just laying around camp: Megan – shirtless – is spread out, lounging in my lap, while Forrester sits on my shoulders; everything was joyous, everyone was content. As she got older, Megan became embarrassed by that photo.

But that is what it means to be a child, children are not self-conscious. Sadly as they grow we teach them to be self-conscious, to not act foolish.

Remember what Jesus said? "You must become like little children if you want to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." I think this is one dimension of that. We need to become less self-conscious and more like little children. We need to care more about what God thinks and care less about what people think.

Unhealthy and unholy people are trapped in their fear of looking foolish. The happiest and healthiest people aren't afraid of looking foolish.

Let's put this in a theological perspective. The book of Genesis describes what happened the nanosecond after Adam and Eve sinned for the first time: "*in that moment, their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness.*" (Gen. 3:7 NLT) The moment they sinned they become self-conscious. **In other words, self-consciousness isn't just a curse. It is part of The Curse.** Before the fall, there were no inhibitions in Eden; which probably means there will be no inhibitions in heaven either!

Think of spiritual maturity as a continuum: at the top is "God-consciousness," at the bottom is "self-consciousness." To become like Christ is to become more God-conscious

and less self-conscious. The end result ought to be – yes, while still doing everything “decently and in order,” but also without any “ungodly” inhibitions.

Writing to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul advised them, *to not be drunk with wine. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill you and control you* (5:18 NLT). What happens when you get drunk? You lose all inhibition. Paul is saying that wine is the wrong way to lose inhibition. The right way is being filled with the Holy Spirit, who helps us overcome our ungodly inhibitions.

As Eugene Peterson wrote:

*Worship is the strategy by which
we interrupt our preoccupation
with ourselves.”*

Eugene Peterson

Thus the lesson we need to take home today: is that **we are way too preoccupied with ourselves and that’s what keeps us from worshipping God the way we could and should.** The greatest moments in worship are those moments when we lose self-consciousness; we forget about ourselves and focus on praising God. It’s almost an “out of body” experience.

That’s what Heaven will be like. We’ll be so enraptured by God that we won’t be thinking about ourselves. We’ll be too busy enjoying God. Forever.

Let’s pray about this.