



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

6th Sunday after Trinity ~ 11th July 2021

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

We have yet to receive guidance about good practice after July 19th; we will continue to keep people safe and to feel safe, we welcome your views.

Services with Social Distancing

St Peter's Sundays 8am & 11am; Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's Sundays 9.15am

St John's Sundays 9.30am; Tuesdays 10am

"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."

Prayers

God of justice, God of salvation, from every land you call a people to yourself. Yours is the work we do, yours the message we carry. Keep your Church single-minded and faithful to you. Let failure not discourage us nor success beguile our hearts, as you send us to proclaim the gospel. We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God of the prophets, whose word cuts through the webs of power and holds the tyrant to account: be with all who raise their voice against oppression and misrule, who are imprisoned and abused for freedom's sake; help us to stand and speak with them and witness to your kingdom now; through Jesus Christ, the name above all others. Amen.

2 Samuel 6 v1-5 & 12b-19

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.

They brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt-offerings and offerings of well-being before the Lord. When David had finished offering the burnt-offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts, and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

Gospel of St Mark 6 v14-29

King Herod heard of the healings and other miracles, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, 'John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him.' But others said, 'It is Elijah.' And others said, 'It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.' But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.' For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, 'Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.' And he solemnly swore to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.' She went out and said to her mother, 'What should I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the baptizer.' Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.' The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Meditation

If we were allowed to sing I suspect we would be having “Lord of the Dance” David dancing before the Ark, and his wife Michal being scandalised. Dancing at the court of King Herod with political machinations and a grim ending. What either of these dances looked like is, of course, speculation. Salome, for that is the name attributed to Herodias's daughter, seems to dance an erotic dance to win her prize. I suspect we are all expected to be scandalised by the story. Herod's court seems to be a hot bed of family intrigues; with marriages, divorces, near incestuous relationships, and sometimes the most ruthless elimination of family members. Even for its time and place, it is made to seem that powerful people are abusing their position and influence and to live a life that is both promiscuous and decadent. John the Baptist's voice of criticism of court morality hits home and revenge is planned, and revenge served up as John's head on a platter!

What of David's dance; are we meant to be, like Michal, equally scandalised? The whole of the David narrative in the Old Testament books of Samuel shows the gradual transition of Israelite society. Today's story marks a significant step in Israel's religious life. The Ark of the Covenant, an acacia wood chest with shafts attached for carrying, thought to contain the Commandment tablets given to Moses, is being brought to Jerusalem. A generation later the Ark will cease its wanderings and be located in the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple that David's son Solomon will cause to be built. As the Ark is placed in a tent, David first offers thanks to God, then blesses the people, then they share in a meal; our service in Church today has this as one of its many echoes – ingredients in worship then as now.

But, let's get back to dancing, (feel free to dance at this point if you like!) or rather thinking about dancing. It is quite common for me to ask a family, when we are arranging a funeral, how couples first met. I think the most common answer for the older generation is “at a dance”. Dancehalls, village halls, family gatherings, all then had dancing as a way people met, especially young people. Yes, for some, once they had formed into couples and got married, dancing may have remained part of life, but when “courting” it seemed to have the most significant place. Perhaps, in that past era, it was a way of limiting or controlling physical contact, but enabling people to get close and experience some sort of intimacy. Styles of dancing may have changed from the very formal to the very free, from the quite staid to the energetic, and most of my lifetime very much something that involved pairing off. Musical accompaniment has also varied from Palm Court through Jazz to Rock, Disco and beyond.

I have to admit that dancing has never held much attraction for me, maybe because of my musical tastes (I love watching classical ballet, but never imagined I could dance like that!). Maybe because “pairing-off” had little appeal for me, maybe I was never really into energetic exercise, or maybe because of bodily self-consciousness – if you have ever been to a social gathering with me you will know I describe myself as a “conscientious objector” as far as dancing is concerned!

Does Michal object because David’s dance is a worship of God? Is it too erotic (or homo-erotic) for her? Does she think such a display is unfitting for a King? Does she see the whole enterprise as bringing in a new era overthrowing the values and life of her father Saul? Are we supposed to sympathise with David or Michal in this marital spat or domestic dispute? I doubt if we are expected to be sympathetic in the matter of Salome’s dance. She is manipulated, and she manipulates. She uses her beauty or eroticism for destruction and death. Perhaps John would have been executed anyway. The gospel writers want to show a clear succession from John to Jesus, just as the writers of Samuel show a succession from a wandering tribal people with temporary leaders to a nation with a Capital city, Temple and dynastic Kings.

Dancing can be seen as sensuous and dangerous, but it can also be seen as liberating and humanising. Likewise, change or progress can be seen as an enlightened step forward, or a discarding of worthy values. Our readings today invite thoughtful reflection, not jumping to obvious conclusions. We do have to acknowledge we live in a society where bodies can be used as a marketing tool; where pressure to conform to various body images can cause untold damage to self-esteem; where physical and sexual abuse occur far too often. We do have to acknowledge we live in a society where sexuality is used for self-gratification, in power games, or as a commodity. In our society we talk about heading up an organisation or a project; about arms and arming; about footing the bill; about being the heart and soul of an event; of being the eyes and ears. We use body language a lot in church; the Church as the body of Christ, communion as receiving the body of Christ.

We can think the best way to treat our bodies and sexuality is to look back to the values and ways of previous eras (but beware rose tinted spectacles!). Or, maybe, we can see God as leading us to a different world with different expectations and structures that may at first threaten us, or even disgust us, but which can be based around the God that danced the world into being. I’ll end with how we begin our marriage services; “God is love, and those who live in love live in God and God lives in them” *1 John 4v16*.

God bless, Andrew

Prayers

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
and I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,
and I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth,
at Bethlehem I had my birth.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,
and I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

I danced for the scribe and the pharisee,
but they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me.
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John -
they came with me and the dance went on.

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame;
the holy people said it was a shame.
they whipped and they stripped and they hung me on high,
and they left me there on a Cross to die.

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;
it's hard to dance with the devil on your back.
They buried my body and they thought I'd gone,
but I am the Dance, and I still go on.

They cut me down and I leapt up high;
I am the life that'll never, never die;
I'll live in you if you'll live in me -
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.

We pray for strength to follow Jesus.
Saviour, we hear your call, help us to follow.

Jesus said; "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant." Renew your Church in love and faithfulness; and help us to serve you with joy.

Jesus said; "Unless you change and become like little children you can never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Let not the needy be forgotten; nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Jesus said; "Blessed are the humble; they will receive what God has promised."

Make us instruments of your peace; and let your glory be over all the earth.

Jesus said; "Be merciful as the Father is merciful; love your enemies and do good to them." Make your ways known upon earth, Lord God; your saving power among all peoples.

Jesus said; "Love one another as I have loved you; there is no greater love than this, to lay down your life for your friends." Guide the leaders of this and every nation; that justice may prevail throughout the world.

Jesus said; "Go to people everywhere and make them my disciples and I will be with you to the end of time." Saviour, we hear your call, help us to follow.

God of mercy, you know us and love us and hear our prayer: keep us in the eternal fellowship of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

Amen