

March 20, 2022 Order of Worship

Worship Leader: Patrick Preheim

Accompaniment and Song Leading: Susan Ens Funk

Sermon Contributors: Edna Froese and Ella Ens Funk

Prelude

Welcome, Announcements and Invocation

- Treaty Acknowledgement VT #878
- Invocation VT #861

Gathering Hymn: VT #550 God Who Touches Earth with Beauty

Service of Shadows

Lighting the Peace Lamp

Hymn of Response: VT #209 We Dream of a Turning

Joys, Concerns and Congregational Prayer

With the Children: Psalm 150

Hymn: #113 Cantai ao Senhor (O Sing to the Lord)

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 31:1-13

Sermon: Reflections on Dance

- Patrick Preheim, Edna Froese & Ella Ens Funk

Hymn: VT #175 Planets Humming as They Wander

Benediction: Colossians 3:15-17 VT #818

Exiting hymn: VT #847 You Shall Go Out with Joy

Psalm 150

Praise the LORD!
Praise God in the temple;
in highest heavens!
Praise! Praise God's mighty deeds;
noble majesty!

Praise! Praise God with trumpet blasts,
with lute and harp!
Praise! Praise God with tambourine and dance,
with strings and pipe!
Praise! Praise God with crashing cymbals,
with loud clashing cymbals!
Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD!

Jeremiah 31:1-13

At that time, says the LORD, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. Thus says the LORD: The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the LORD appeared to them from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O Israel!

Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merry-makers.

Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit...

Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

Biblical Reflections (Patrick)

Dance is creative. For those who dance and appreciate dance, it is a form of creative spirituality. Even the non-dancers among us (the hocky players, the quilters, the knitters, the walkers and so forth) can appreciate the manner in which movement can contribute to spiritual health. Dance is the focus for this Sunday. I begin with a general biblical survey of dance.

On the surface our biblical text is skewed dramatically toward dance being a joyful event. After God's grace at the Red Sea Miriam dances (Ex 15:20). David dances before the LORD (2nd Sam 6.5 & 6.14-16). Today's scripture from Jeremiah details dancing in relation to celebration. This expression of joy, translated as dancing, is often contrasted with lament. For example, we hear in Ecclesiastes of a time to mourn and a time to dance (3:4)—as if we can not dance to express our mourning. And in Psalm 30 (v.11) we hear of mourning being turned to dancing—as if the two are polar opposites. The general sense we get in the biblical survey is that a person dances when they are joyful and one does not dance in a time of grieving. It is not that physical expressions of sadness at a time of grief were forbidden.¹ Rather, the ancients distinguished between certain kinds of physical movement for happy or sad times. This then takes me to the linguistic roots of “dance”.

I like my lexicons, biblical dictionaries, and theological word books. I do not like it when they say, “origin of word uncertain”.² The root of the word, in my estimation, most closely resembles the word we have for “hours” or “keeping time”. Many dances, if one thinks about it, are about keeping time. Orchestra would be in the same linguistic family—a group of people keeping time. Sometimes we rhythmically move when expressing joy and sometimes sorrow and sometimes to center ourselves. We try to keep time with emotions within us and circumstances beyond us.

I apologize for the this biblical and word stuff. I do think, however, that the words we use and employ are important. As I sometimes do, I like to intersperse my dry reflections with speakers who have additional biblical / theological thoughts. So we turn now to Ella Ens Funk.

¹ *Theological Wordbook of the New Testament* (volume II), edited by Gerhard Kittle and translated by Geoffrey Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, MI: WM Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1965), p. 845.

² ὀρχήομαι: <https://biblehub.com/greek/3738.htm>

Reflections from Ella Ens Funk

My initial thoughts centre around dance as a form of expression, joy, and gratitude. Dance is both a discipline I have practiced for many years, and also a natural part of my response to the world, regardless of whether music is being played or not. (My roommate once walked into the kitchen to see me dancing whilst washing the dishes. Only then did it strike me that some people do not see or use dance as a part of life.) Dance is a part of my spirit in many ways, something I often reflect on is the feeling of awe when seeing the ways our joints are articulated and can move. Even a small motion, like pointing your toes, requires several muscles to engage, and watching this happen always reminds me that I am blessed to have this motion available to me, and that our bodies, though flawed, are complex and amazing. Dance is a visceral reminder to me that I am alive- that I can breathe, my muscles can stretch and contract, my brain can translate music and emotions into movement. It allows me to live in the moment, something that is often difficult to do in the era of the attention economy.

The word "spirit" to me in this context makes me think of my identity, or whatever it is that makes me who I am, and how dance connects to that. It also makes me think of how that essence or idea of "me" has been shaped by God and my understanding of being a Mennonite. I feel grateful that I was raised by a family of people who dance. It is unimaginable to me to live without dance as a manifestation of joy. In the Bible, dance is often referred to in the context of celebration and is an expression of happiness. In my experience, there are mournful dances and joyful dances, but I think the idea that dance is a physical way of processing intense emotion is important to my life, and can be recognized as a tool in our spiritual lives.

Ella Dances to Pia Jesu

- videos of the actual talk and dance can be found on the livestream edition of this service

Patrick speaks to Spiritual Temperaments and Movement³

A book I once had on my shelf is the one you see on the screen.⁴ I loaned it out and it never returned—on to greener pastures I guess. Norrisey and Michael's reflections on different styles of prayer broadened my horizons greatly. Prayer for me, growing up, was pretty standard: close your eyes, uncross your legs, be very still. There is nothing biblical about this prayer posture, and it works for many, but it is not the only bodily posture in which to offer God our joys or concerns.

Psalm 141 (v.2) speaks of “lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice”. Lifting hands as prayer—who would have thought. Many religious folk find kneeling to be a form that expresses contrition and devotion. Paul references “a holy kiss” repeatedly (Rm 16:16, 1st Cor 16:20, 2nd Cor 13:12, 1st Thes 5:26)--- I am not suggesting in this COVID world we starting kissing one another as a greeting, only highlighting that physical expressions of our faith is a part of the biblical tradition. And it is in the biblical tradition because it is a part of who many of us are. Listening to myself gets wearisome (almost like listening to a preacher). It is time for additional perspective. Edna.

³ http://spiritualpractice.ca/what_practice/type/

⁴ Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey, *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality Types*.

Reflections from Edna Froese

Dance is patterned movement, usually to music but a good beat will do as well, or even nothing at all. Dance is instinctive: every small child responds bodily to music unless rebuked for it. Almost all cultures have some forms of dance through which to express joy, sorrow, worship, delight.

In ancient traditions, dance is part of religious expression and rituals of life. When Don and I were in the Saskatoon Folk Dance Club, we learned dances that celebrated all kinds of events, from weddings to war, and including daily work – doing laundry and picking berries became choreographed dance. Cultures differ in regard to who dances with whom and whether men or women get the more flamboyant movements. The point is that the human body was made to dance to music, in company with other human bodies.

Eastern Orthodox Christians see this universal desire to move in harmony in theological terms. Their Greek word is perichoresis, “peri” meaning “rotation” or “going round” and “choresis” meaning “to make room for.” Just as the planets and the stars follow repeated patterns, moving in harmony with one another, so each member of the trinity gives way to (or makes room for) the others. (If you want to see an enactment of that, I’ve included an internet link in the online copy.)⁵

Perichoresis is the name of a Greek wedding dance in which “There are not two dancers, but at least three. They start to go in circles, weaving in and out in this very beautiful pattern of motion. They start to go faster and faster and faster, all the while staying in perfect rhythm and in sync with each other. Eventually, they are dancing so quickly (yet so effortlessly) that as you look at them, it just becomes a blur. Their individual identities are part of a larger dance. The early church fathers and mothers looked at that dance (perichoresis) and said, “That’s what the Trinity is like.” It’s a harmonious set of relationships in which there is mutual giving and receiving” (Jonathan Marlowe).⁶

According to the late Archbishop Joseph Raya of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, God “in His inner life is essentially relationship”; all three persons of the Trinity are unconfused and undivided: “They are a unity of motion, a one and unique harmony, a one and unique beauty of ecstasy in motion” (*Byzantine Church and Culture*, 1992). The Trinity is *Perichoreisis*, a great dance, a “constant eternal movement of love and life,” a rhythmic and joyful playfulness.

That is not what I ever heard as a child. I was taught very early that dance was a worldly, evil thing. Even to move around too much on the piano bench in church was probably sinful. I loved to move, but I learned to sit still. I was allowed to run outdoors, ride a toboggan down the hill, and maybe participate in some

⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHHrmPC1KsY&list=RDLVfLji0fPwiyA&start_radio=1

⁶ <https://kentheo.com/2020/05/11/the-dance-of-love-perichoresis>

sports at school, not much, though, because human beings were made for work, not pleasure.

I was in my late thirties when I first saw dance in worship, in our MB church. It was done by a trained ballet dancer who interpreted the lyrics of a song – a rather daring experiment then. Most people in the service were horrified beyond words. I was also without words because I'd been entranced, so taken out of myself that I felt I couldn't breathe. That was my first inkling that the Spirit called to me differently than what the unspoken rules of our church dictated.

There were other occasions when I observed dance that moved me profoundly, sometimes a romantic couples dance, sometimes a folk dance performance, and once in a while, dance as part of worship. At some point, I told myself that if I could not learn to dance I would have missed what I wanted, what I needed. I believed poet W.H. Auden when he wrote, "I know nothing, except what everyone knows – if there when Grace dances, I should dance."

When a friend invited me to a worship dance teaching session, I accepted, with a mixture of emotions. I struggled to learn the simplest steps, but to finally be able to move as one with others in joyous worship was almost overwhelming. I wept as I drove home because I felt in my bones and my heart that I had been born for this, yet half my life was over already.

In the next few years of fairly intense learning—weekly folk dance and ballroom dance, plus occasional worship dance and a brief experiment of free movement to music as therapy—I came to believe that love of God, love of self, love of others must needs be embodied to make sense at the deepest level. It was through dance that I began to heal from the wounds of a dysfunctional family, from the hurt of never quite fitting in. I needed to live fully into my body in order to feel both joy and grief.

A few occasions remain vivid in my memory: we were learning an Israeli dance at the folk dance club, which met in a church auditorium, and since my body recognizes Jewish music more readily than any other ethnic music, I learned it quickly. As the two lines of dancers moved toward each other, lines interweaving, and then back again, arms raised high, I began weeping as I danced. It was mostly joy, but not all.

At an STM retreat for students and faculty, I offered to teach everyone a few simple folk dances as a way of avoiding the usual miserable ice-breaker activities. To my delighted surprise, almost everyone participated, and soon faces were smiling, even laughing, and the group was one. The following year, I was asked to lead a workshop on dance in worship. Such an amateur I was—we should all learn to dance as children—yet even simple steps were enough.

The instructor at a workshop told us that she had danced in worship at her father's funeral. It had been an act of respect for him and an expression of her

grief. When I heard that, I knew exactly which Jewish dance I wanted performed at my own funeral, and I knew which dancers should do it. Much time has passed since then and it is now unlikely that that will happen. I wish, though, that I had had a video made when I could still do the multiple turns with some grace.

The last two years have been difficult in all kinds of ways. I did not at first realize that what might have affected my mental health the most was that all our occasions for dance were cancelled. I thought about just taking some music and my dance shoes to the empty church, but I couldn't find either energy or will. I allowed myself to be content with walking and cycling. Those are good activities but not enough. I should have remembered that dance is not just the language of joy, but also the language of mourning and of prayer. Perhaps I did know that and was simply afraid to risk putting aside my protective emotional shell. One cannot dance and remain unmoved.

I wonder now if I could make dance a Lenten discipline. I hope that I can still relearn to pray through dance.

Patrick Again: What now—the discipleship of the text
Much more need not be said. I am always, though, intrigued by the discipleship to which we are invited as we relate to God and scripture. How one chooses to pray through movement is tied, in part, to our temperament and tradition and learning. If one would wish to explore additional avenues of physical prayer I would recommend a book by Tony Jones entitled: *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Via Activa section).⁷ Some of the Christian practices he lists are the following:

- a labyrinth walk-- and I have hand held copies of a labyrinth for those less mobile
- stations of the cross
- pilgrimage
- fasting
- the sign of the cross and other bodily prayers
- service
- sabbath practice

Each of these practices really deserves a Sunday unto itself. So I name them and refer people to resources as they have interest. Or maybe we come back to them later this summer, next Lent, or sometime later.

God is our Creator. We are fashioned beautifully and uniquely and in the image of God. We are spiritual beings in whom our ultimate rest comes in the One greater than us. May this time together and this hour of worship allow us to move with God's Spirit in our lives, the life of this congregation, our community and our world. Amen.

Patrick Preheim, co-pastor Nutana Park Mennonite Church

Hymn: VT #175 Planets Humming as They Wander

⁷ Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), pp. 125-194.