

Magic Mike and the Queen of Heart[less]

[Texts - II Samuel Chapter 6; Mark 6:14-29]

Pastor Dave Shackle

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These days, if events like those described in his morning's Scripture readings were captured on video, those videos would definitely go viral! In the Old Testament, King David, wearing only a skimpy linen loincloth, passionately dances in front of the Ark of the Covenant, a boisterous crowd of young women, *and* his stunned and mortified wife. Michal angrily scolds her husband for "uncovering himself before the eyes of his maids, like some vulgar, ill-bred commoner!" And David fires-back, that as God's appointed King in Israel, he will make himself "even more undignified than this!" In other words, if his dancing and displays of religious zeal bother her, then she'd better get used to it!

Then, in our New Testament reading, we hear about an even more dysfunctional Hebrew Royal Family. King Herod marries his brother's wife, Herodias, which isn't a particularly wise or ethical thing to do. John the Baptist publically denounces their marriage; so Herod promptly has John arrested and thrown into prison. Then, at a lavish birthday bash that Herod throws for himself, the inebriated King is beguiled by the sensual dancing of his young stepdaughter [who is also his niece!]. Herod tells her, "Whatever you ask me, I'll give you - up to half of my kingdom!" So the young woman goes to her mother, for some sound maternal advice. Herodias tells her to ask for the severed head of John the Baptist [silver platter, optional]. The surprised Herod, too afraid to back-down in front of his important guests, reluctantly agrees. So...Herod loses his nerve; John loses his head; the step-daughter loses the opportunity to ask for something actually worthwhile; and Herodias gets her revenge. [I guess those good-old "Traditional Biblical Family Values" may be a bit more shaky than some people like to admit!]

This past week, I tried to figure-out why the Biblical scholars who put together our yearly Lectionary readings chose these two particular texts. Other than some pretty messed-up family dynamics, the only common element is that they both contain stories about some pretty spectacular *dancing!* And while that may seem like a rather shallow theme for a sermon, it may not be - not when you consider *dancing* as an outward expression of some of our deepest-seated emotions and drives. King David dances in a joyful celebration of Life, and as an uninhibited expression of the exuberance he feels in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant - the symbolic vessel of the *Divine* Presence! Herod's step-daughter [traditionally named Salome] dances in order to stir-up her stepfather's drunken passion, and entice him into giving her whatever she wants. So we have two stories, about two different people dancing, who are motivated by two completely different reasons. I'd like us to think about the things that motivated them, *and* the people around them. But more importantly, I'd like us to consider what kind of things

motivate you and me today - what things compel *us* to move, or act, or behave in the ways that we do.

King Herod, driven by the guilt of doing something that he knows is wrong, has John the Baptist imprisoned. Queen Herodias' anger against John, for speaking-out against their marriage, impels her to heartlessly cry "Off with his head!" And Herod's strong desire to save face with his party guests, motivates him to follow-through with that gruesome execution. In David's case, his motivation isn't to please or impress the crowd - or his wife - but to freely express his joy and gratitude to the Holy One. And even though his dancing raises a few eyebrows, and raises a ruckus between him and his wife, David doesn't care, because he is listening to his own heart. And his heart is telling him to dance like there's no tomorrow!

So maybe something for you and me to take-away from this, is to remember that *whatever* we do, it's important that we be in touch with our genuine *motivations*. For example, when I offer someone my "constructive criticism," is my true desire to help make his or her situation better, or is it to make myself feel better, and perhaps a little bit superior? Do I give to people in need, out of genuine compassion for them; or is it to somehow assuage my guilt, for my own comfortable lifestyle and my sometimes excessive consumerism? Does our praise and service to the Holy One, truly flow from a deep sense of love and gratitude, or are we just investing in some kind of eternal "fire insurance" policy?

The fact is, you and I can do a lot of things that appear to be good and proper, or even noble; yet without a positive motivation, we can end up developing a spirit of apathy, negativity, or even resentment. That's because when our actions are driven by a self-conscious concern about how others might perceive us, or by an underlying fear of some kind of eternal payback, then our lives begin to feel like a dull, duty-filled drudgery - rather than a delightfully Divine Dance! And without that Divine inspiration and heartfelt motivation, even our worship becomes lifeless and cold.

There's a story about a man who is experiencing a spiritual awakening. Since he has no church home or background, he decides to attend a nearby congregation. He's impressed by the beautiful worship space; deeply moved by the glorious music; and he feels as if the minister is speaking directly to his heart. At one point in the sermon, the man lets out a loud "Amen!" Well, the people are shocked - they wonder, "what's with this guy?" As the minister continues, the man erupts with a hearty "Hallelujah!" The people around him scowl and shake their heads. A little later, the man lets out a sincere, "Thank you Jesus!" At that, an usher comes-up beside him and tersely whispers, "Sir, you can't speak-out like that in this church; it just isn't proper!" The man sheepishly smiles and says, "I'm sorry, but you see, I just found Jesus!" To which the usher replies, "Well, you certainly didn't find him here!"

Sometimes, when the Spirit moves you, you've just gotta shout, or laugh, or sing, or dance for joy - even though it may cause others to feel a bit uncomfortable! King David is so moved by the Divine Presence, that he momentarily forgets that he *is* a king, and he acts more like a giddy little kid - dancing and jumping and joyfully celebrating with everyone else in the crowd. Meanwhile, Michal tries to distance herself from that "vulgar" crowd - proudly clinging to her royal "dignity" as King Saul's daughter and King David's wife. How much happier and healthier she could have been, had she realized - that as her own unique person - her true identity is a loved and cherished child of God. And so it is for you and me today.

When you and I remember that our real value - our true identity - is rooted and grounded in the Eternal Source of Divine Love, we can be set free from our self-conscious insecurities and limitations, doubts and fears.

Free to graciously give to others from that Divine abundance;

Free to forgive and accept others, as we ourselves have been forgiven and accepted;

Free to sing and dance, laugh and love, rejoice and give thanks!

Because when we truly trust that all that we have and all that we are, ultimately comes to us as a Divine Gift, then we will be motivated to joyfully give thanks - not just with our mouths, but also with our hearts and hands and feet. And our entire lives become a marvelous celebration of the wonderful blessings that are ours to freely share! [Can I get an Amen?] Amen!