

Psalm 30
Creekside COB
October 30, 2005

You Make Me Feel Like Dancing

Do you remember your first dance? Some of you might be hesitant to answer. Maybe you grew up in a Brethren home that drew sharp boundaries between what was and was not acceptable, but you danced anyway. You just never told anyone about it because dancing, along with card playing was frowned upon by the church. It is something we had in common with the Mennonites. They had a rule of conduct about dancing. Do you know what you say to a fellow Mennonite at a dance club? Nothing. *You ignore them, and they'll ignore you.*"

I remember my first freshman dance. The gymnasium lights were lowered and the music began. The guys milled around on one side of the gym, the girls on the other. The guys tried to act cool, but were cold, clammy-handed nervous wrecks, mustering the courage to walk across the floor during the first "slow" song and ask, *"Would you like to dance?"* I used a defensive-offensive strategy. I didn't bother asking the prettiest girls. It diminished the odds of getting turned down and suffering a crushed psyche.

I'm not much of a dancer. I'm left handed and have two left feet. The lifeguard was off duty the day the dancing desire went swimming in my family's gene pool. I didn't have to dance much since I played in the band that provided the music. My guitar was my dance partner.

A while back I shared some verses of a song by Leo Sayers called, *"I Can't Dance."* This week another of his songs popped into my head called, *"You Make Me Feel Like Dancing."* What caused Leo's to go from "I can't," to "I feel like dancing"? Why

do people dance? It's an innate response to the rhythm of music. Watch how babies bob and sway when music is playing. It's a means of self-expression. It's an art form. It can tell a story. It is a way to worship. It's a source of entertainment. It's expresses our innermost feelings. For Leo, the love of a lady was turning him into Fred Astaire.

Today I will use dancing as an image of what happens when we hear the music God plays in our hearts. Dancing is a response to how it feels to know that we are the objects of God's outrageous love. We are continuing our reflection upon the urgency of evangelism in our church's mission. If you still feel uncomfortable thinking of yourselves as evangelists, let me suggest seeing yourselves as dance instructors.

On the bulletin cover is a dancer leaping over Psalm 30: "*You turned my lament into a whirling dance.*" Many of the Psalms are before and after stories... stories of lives brought back from the brink-- of broken lives restored; of besieged people emerging victorious; of lost, frightened, bewildered people finding their footing upon the foundation of God.

***My God, I yelled for help and you put me together.
You pulled me out of the grave, gave me another chance at life when I was down and out.***

***I called out to you, God; I laid my case before you...
You did it: you changed my wild lament into a whirling dance;
You ripped off my black mourning band and decked me with wildflowers.
I'm about to burst with song; I can't keep quiet about you.
God, my God, I can't thank you enough.***

We don't know the reason for his lament, but God intervened and the psalmist responded in song and a dance. "*I can't keep quiet about you.*" After Jesus' resurrection, thousands responded enthusiastically to the disciple's message. This prompted the authorities to forbid them from speaking in public. And Peter said, "No disrespect intended, but we cannot be

Speak of what we have seen and heard. It's too good to keep to ourselves."

I had a dream that I was seated alone in a large sanctuary. It was totally silent until a woman walked into the chancel, and began to sing. I didn't recognize the song, but she had a lovely voice and I listened intently. Soon two others joined her. Their unison singing turned to harmony. Then a small group appeared at the back of the sanctuary, lending their voices. Another group appeared to the left, and another to the right. The more voices that sang the song the more moving it became. I remembered thinking as the song continued to swell, that it was, without question, the most beautiful music I had ever heard—so beautiful that I began to cry. I kept saying to myself, "Remember how it goes. You must not forget this song. It is the only music that matters."

When I woke, I couldn't remember it. I knew the dream was a messenger. As I reflected upon it, I recalled how peaceful the dream felt, and how, at that time in my life, there was great upheaval. I didn't feel my life had value. Others were not depreciating me. I was doing it to myself. No matter what I did, it wasn't good enough. I was fragmented and disjointed and depressed. Then the dream came. I remembered standing and swaying to the music. It dawned on me that those little groups of singers were the far-flung parts of myself that God was bringing together into the sanctuary of God's heart.

When you break down the biblical word, "atonement," you discover its meaning. *At-one-ment*. To be atoned is to be made right with God by God. To be atoned is to be at one with God, yourself, and others. It is being at peace inside your own skin, which unfortunately is not the case for most people... church people included.

How many of you, without reservation, can say that you like yourselves? There is no facet of you that you do not like. There is no shadow wearing a black hat roaming around the attic of your soul. It's just as I thought. The reason that people cannot (and more times than we care to admit, we cannot), feel the grip

of God's love is the disdain we have for ourselves. Every day a civil war goes on inside us. Every day we expend energy suppressing the voices that say, "You aren't good enough. You don't measure up. You're inadequate. You're insignificant. You're a hypocrite. You're an imposter. You're 90% fake. You ARE NOT a good person." The world goes to work on us with remedies for all that ails us... "You need a bigger house. You need a new car. You need a new wardrobe, darling. You need a makeover. You need a different partner."

If you work up enough courage to be vulnerable and admit to such feelings, there are purveyors of the gospel who will say, *"Of course you are miserable. You feel bad because you are bad."*

There is a bumper sticker that makes my blood boil whenever I see it. It reads: "Give Jesus a try. If you don't like him, the devil will always be glad to have you back." So much for a positive motivation to invite people to consider Christianity.

Last Sunday I said the enemy of evangelism is pride—the attitude that I, the Christian, the insider, have what you, the outsider, do not; the attitude that I possess the truth that you, as of yet, do not; that attitude that if you follow these steps, say these words, and believe these things, and act as I do, you're fixed for eternity.

If pride is the enemy, humility is our ally. Humility reminds us that the Holy Spirit has been at work in that person's life before we arrived. Brian McClaren says the church must have a radical reorientation in its understanding and practice of evangelism. At Annual Conference he said the church is witnessing something it has not seen before. Study the periods of renewal and revival in church history, you discover that each one started *within* the church. But now, for the first time, we are seeing a revival happening outside the church.

The desire for God is being expressed in the hunger of people who aren't buying the prescriptions the world is peddling. They wait to hear a story that holds life together in times that tear life

apart. Do you know where are people are going to hear the stories that ask the big questions? I'll give you a hint... it isn't the church. It's the movies. The most successful films are those that pose questions about the meaning and mystery of life. Someone said, *"The Holy Spirit is outside trying to get into people's lives, and on the inside, trying to get outside of people's lives."* God's Spirit hasn't set up shop in the church. On the floor plans of our new church there is no room designated for God. We aren't even going to set up a cot for him.

What is the purpose of the church in the living of these days? It is learning the best ways possible to tell the story of Jesus Christ. It is helping people tune in to the music that God has been playing all along, which they have not recognized as being of God.

Our job is to help people listen to the music that can turn their disdain into dancing. With this in mind, I want you to pay attention to some verses from Ann Weems:

When they ask what happened here, we'll simply say
Christ came by and we learned his dance.

The Lord does his dance on the temple floor
and the Pharisees are properly shocked:
a mad man, dangerous, unfit to guide our youth, a heretic!
And they flee to the public where their praying can be seen.

The Lord does his dance with a tax collector
and the Sadducees scream: Now! Now do you see who he
is?
He dines with sinners while we—we have all the work to
do.
The man's a drunkard!

The Lord does his dance with a woman of the streets.
And the church people rub their hands together gleefully.
Aha! Now we've got you!

But he looked into them and they crept away, unable to
throw the first stone.

**The Lord does his dance with all the wrong people:
with slaves and lepers and tax collectors,
with cursing fishermen, adulterers and thieves,
with outcasts and castoffs.
He dances with the unclean and the unwhole.
And he won't dance with us,
no matter how loud we cry Lord, Lord...
He won't dance with us until we become, of all things, as
little children;
until we are the needy, the outcasts, and the orphans.**

**Then he says to us: Come unto me!
And we become the accepted unacceptables,
our brokenness is bound, and we are able to follow the
dance.**

**The music is never ending and if we miss a step or two,
or if we fall exhausted, the Lord is always there to pull us
to our feet.**

**So come now, let's dance n the temple!
Let's dance in the sanctuary and in the streets!
Let's join hands and dance where the music leads us,
for the Lord's dance is never ending; the music goes on
forever!**