

Dancing our Faith

II Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19; Mark 6:14-29

Knightswood Secondary School, which is located in the West End of Glasgow, is one of the City's largest Secondary's with a roll of approximately 1,400 pupils. It is a co-educational, non-selective and non-denominational, educating pupils of all abilities, cultures and social backgrounds.

I met Kay Dingwall, the inspirational head teacher. She is a committed Christian and a gentle, appropriate but pervasive faith influence is found throughout the school. There is a strong engagement with the local community, and a strong engagement with the outside world. Some young people had just returned from a life-changing volunteering visit to Malawi. Kay Dingwall told me that the school has a long tradition of successful teaching and learning and in many respects it is a centre of excellence. The school's goal is the provision of an education that meets the needs and abilities of each child, allowing them to develop their full potential. Standards are high and there is a strong emphasis on successful learning. Pupils are provided with many opportunities to develop the skills necessary to become effective young citizens. The School is fortunate to be served by a very experienced and committed staff that constantly urges students to achieve qualifications of the highest possible standard so that they are well placed to pursue their career choice in the future.

A unique feature of the School is that it is the home of the National Dance School of Scotland, which provides specialist tuition for some of the country's most gifted young dancers. These youngsters follow the School curriculum and take a full and active part in School life in addition to the specialist dance training they receive.

The Dance School of Scotland is the country's only fully funded centre of excellence for vocational dance and musical theatre. The school is funded by The Scottish Government and is available to talented youngsters from all over Scotland.

The students at the Dance School receive free specialist tuition from dance and musical theatre professionals in 'state of the art' facilities. Together the schools provide a unique blend; pupils have the opportunity to fulfil their performance potential while developing a strong academic education.

Over more than 30 years, the school has developed a national and international reputation; former students are members of prestigious dance companies including Scottish Ballet, The Royal Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Rambert Dance Company, Vienna State and Royal Swedish Ballet. Others are performing in West End and Broadway productions such as Chicago, Matilda, Wicked, Legally Blonde, Mamma Mia, and 42nd Street.

Dance: we encountered it in school gymnasias in the weeks leading up to Christmas; we move around slightly self-consciously for that special first dance at your wedding reception; there's the slightly embarrassing but endearing 'dad dancing'; there's the glory of ballet; there's the athleticism and poise of good Highland dancing. All cultures have some form of way in which movement is co-ordinated into dance. In dance at its best there is rhythm, there is co-ordination, there is a bringing together of music and movement in unspoken relationship. Most dance is about joy. Some dance is about remembering. It is often about communication.

Last year I visited a Church of Scotland care home and was taken into a room where a very old husband and wife were together with their carer. The husband, frail but mentally sharp, told me about how his wife had lost the power of speech and lived with a form of dementia that had made it uncertain whether or not she understood what was happening around her. She could still move around. They had discovered that when music was played, she would move in time with it. "She liked to dance when we were younger", he told me. Waltz music was played on a CD, and I wondered. I held the old lady in the waltz hold, the care assistant turned the music up, and slowly, the old lady, her mind often unravelled, her tongue no longer able to speak, danced with me while her husband clapped in time with the music. It was one of the most profound pastoral and spiritual moments of my life.

David, when the Ark of the Covenant was being brought to the new capital of the ancient state of Israel, Jerusalem, was so moved by the presence of God that the Ark represented that he danced. The Ark, a wooden box overlaid with gold, surmounted by two winged angels, was said to contain the tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments, also a little jar of manna, the bread-like food that had kept the Israelites alive in their desert wanderings, and Aaron's Rod, a wooden staff that was said to have performed miracles.

What the Ark symbolises is the presence of God. It told the ancient people that God was near, that God was present with God's people. And when that presence is real, it moved people to pray, and to sing, and sometimes to dance. King David, and his people, were moved by the presence of God to celebrate in unfettered, unashamed extravagance and delight and joy. God was with them, God was real and to be worshipped.

David broke the sedate royal pose he might have assumed as he accompanied the Ark to Jerusalem and danced without restraint before his God, and before his people. It didn't please everyone. One princess despised him, but David was unabashed. "I will make merry before the Lord", he said, whatever people might think or feel.

Worship is a very personal engagement with God, even when we worship corporately. Not everyone will like everything, but are we open enough to admit that there are different ways, different methods, different styles which help different people engage with God?

Dancing, like singing, helps us express what we feel when words of our own are not quite enough. David danced, with the people of Israel, before the Lord God. Here was a man who was completely open to God's power and purpose. It is almost as if he enters into a dance with God as his partner. New things are happening, and new things have yet to come.

I suspect I am probably too Presbyterian to urge you all to break out into dance in worship. Maybe that's why God created pews! But reflect on this. When last, with your movement, or with your singing, or with your saying of the Lord's Prayer, did you last really let go and let the Spirit of God fill you and your hearts in worship? Who taught us the restraint and the downcast eyes

and the half-closed mouths as the appropriate way to worship the living, wonderful, tremendous God? In the dance of faith, why are we so minimal and mean?

There will always be those who choose not to join in the dance. But do we, believers in a loving, exuberant, dynamic God want to condemn ourselves to half-filled lives with faces tripping us, refusing to let go a little, be glad for others, and enter into the spirit of things, enter into God's Spirit? David sang, and wrote poetry, and played a harp, and he also ***danced!***

David danced before the Lord with all his might. Appropriate to that time, David let his love of God and his belief in God and his trust in God and his hope in God fill him and take over, for that moment, his whole life. And he danced; he danced with all his might.

I believe we are called, as followers of Jesus Christ, to enter into the dance of faith. Sometimes it may be slow and stately; sometimes it may be measured and dignified; sometimes it may be joyful and exuberant. But at all times, the dance of faith calls us to partner with our fellow worshippers, and with God, as we weave our way through many steps, including all who will join us, and call in from the margins of life those who think they're wallflowers, but have as much right to dance as do we.

In our worship, in all our worship, may your hearts dance, your eyes dance, your smiles dance. Like David, shall we dance for the glory and love of our living God?

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

Amen