

## I Hope You Dance!

### Proper 10, Year B – 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, July 15, 2012*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

What the heck is a preacher supposed to do with this morning's reading from Mark's Gospel? I suppose I could make something of Herod's irrational, though perfectly understandable fear of Jesus' power or growing popularity. I might even jump off from some outlandish assertion about not losing our heads in the midst of trouble. But early this week as I began looking toward this morning with you, I was more and more attracted to our Old Testament lesson for this morning, one of my favorite stories about David the King of Israel. Since I was a little boy, my heart kind of sings along when I hear this story of the king finally bringing home the outward and visible sign of the presence of the Lord Almighty.

Now, to understand the next step in this morning's journey, you need to know that we have kind of a love/hate relationship with country music at the Martindale household. That is to say, Jenny loves it, and the boys and I hate it.

Oh, I don't suppose it's entirely accurate to say that I *hate* country music. When we were younger, Jenny and I used to cut a pretty mean Texas-Two-Step at social functions – and at the occasional San Antonio dance hall. I actually *like* Alabama, both the state *and* the band. And for some strange reason, I have an inexplicable fondness for the nasal stylings of the Redheaded Stranger, Willie Nelson. But I will admit that my taste tends more toward Mozart horn *concerti*, or one of Bach's choral settings of the Mass, or the beautiful sound of *Libera*, the boys' choir of St. Phillip's, Norbury, in South London. Jenny and the boys long ago labeled my musical taste as "Monk Chants," but I only *occasionally* listen to chanting by actual monks.

On the other hand, Jenny is the sort of country music fan that helps you remember that "fan" is short for "fanatic." I know that it probably shocks all of you to the core to know that, over the years, my Tennessee bride has been a dyed-in-the-wool fan of people like Darryl Worley and Brad Paisley and Trace Adkins and, before they turned into a political action committee, the Dixie Chicks. At times that has driven her to after-concert hoarseness, and near heat stroke at country music festivals. But, through even all that, it is in the *car* that our love/hate relationship with country music has been most pronounced.

Left to *my* devices, I will get into the car and hit that one preset way over on the far right to listen to some news or "monk chant" from NPR, or shove in one of the lectures on CD I have from an outfit called The Teaching Company. Trouble is, I am not usually *left* to my own devices in that regard. I am blessed with a spouse that vastly prefers driving to just sitting, especially over long distances, so I count it a true gift indeed that I get to be chauffeured around most of the time we are together. The trouble with that is that it is the long-held rule in the Martindale family that, in addition to the steering wheel, the brake pedal, and the turn signal, the driver of the car also controls the *radio*. Bottom line, when we travel as we have been this week, I end up listening to a *lot* of country music, a goodly amount of it subliminal, if you know what I mean.

The other day, a really strange thing happened as I was meditating on this morning's account of David's entrance into the Holy City. Somewhere in west Nashville on our way to pick up our boys at the airport, or maybe on our way back up to Clarksville, the radio played one of those country songs that have been drummed or drilled or osmosed into my head, and it began running around in there. It's sung, I'm told, by a songstress by the name of Lee Ann Womack, and it includes the lyrics: I hope you never fear those mountains in the distance; Never settle for the path of least resistance; Give the heavens above more than just a passing glance; And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance; I hope you dance.

As he planned for the arrival of the Ark of the Covenant, the King might have put on sack cloth and ashes. For literally centuries, the symbol of God's relationship with his people had been moved from place to place, usually one step ahead of the enemies of the People of God, and now it was come to its permanent resting place. Michal, daughter of a king and wife of another, would not have liked it one little

bit, but repentance and contrition *might* have been an appropriate response, coming so late to give God the glory that was his due. Down through the ages, some Christians have groveled and scraped and crawled through their world, thinking that authentic faith in Jesus Christ needed to come with some sort of explanation or disclaimer. Every now and then, we Episcopalians get to thinking that we owe the world an apology for the fact that we absolutely *know* ourselves to be connected with the Divine through prayer and praise, set apart for his service through Word and Sacrament. But David knew that the only really appropriate response to the chasm between God's righteousness and our complete lack of it – is complete *gratitude*, and so he *danced!*

King David *could* have taken his place of honor at the head of the grand procession, the Grand Marshal of a parade that probably looked a lot like Elizabeth Taylor's Cleopatra arriving in Rome. From the story, that's maybe what his wife, Michal would have preferred. There have always been Christians who have marched and strutted through history, who have brandied the Cross of Christ as if it were a scepter – or a sword, who have used their position and power to persecute and to purge. We Episcopalians are as susceptible as anyone else to thinking our way is *the* way. We're kind of fond of criticizing, or better yet, *ridiculing* other sorts of Christians for lording it over others who don't believe like they do, or worship like they do, or pray like they do. But of course in doing that, we're doing exactly the same thing, aren't we? David knew that whatever he had, he had it only from the loving kindness of his Father, so he threw off his embroidered and encrusted royal robes, and in a simple white robe, he *danced!*

David *might* have waved from the royal balcony or presided from some review stand along the route of procession. David could have left the details to the professionals, to the Levites and the Scribes and the priests, and stayed out of it himself. I suspect Michal might have been pretty satisfied with that as well. Through the centuries, there have been plenty of faithful people who have insisted on living out their Christianity without making a peep. Actually, the hands-off approach to faith is more popular among many Episcopalians than crawling or strutting. Too often we're more than just content with staying out of the way. We're comfortable letting someone else do the work of telling the Good News. We're okay getting someone else to speak a word of comfort to our neighbor, a word of hope to our family member, a word of deliverance to the one we know needs to hear it. David, on the other hand, took the presence of the Glory of the Lord not only seriously, but *personally*, so he *danced!*

"I hope you never lose your sense of wonder," Ms Womack croons, "You get your fill to eat, but always keep your hunger; May you never take one single breath for granted; God forbid love ever leave you empty handed. I hope you still feel small when you stand beside the ocean; Whenever one door closes, I hope one more opens; Promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance; And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance – I hope you dance."

I hope you remember the enormous debt we sinners owe in the face of an ultimately righteous judge. But when you get a chance to wallow in the muck and the mire of all the times you have been hurt, all the times you have been let down, all the times it has been *you* falling short, I hope you find peace in every moment of mercy, that you grasp hold of every *glimmer* of grace. I hope you dance!

I hope you understand just how wonderful it is that you are a child of God, a joint heir of everything there is with the One who conquered even death itself – for the whole world, and just for *you!* And when you get a chance to march and strut and look down your nose at those who don't see the world through your eyes, I hope you find joy in knowing that every one of them is *just* as deeply loved. I hope you dance!

I hope you realize just how *personally* our Creator has involved himself in the human condition, leaving the glories of heaven to live and die, as one of us. I hope you realize just how intimately he cares not just for the whole world, but for me, and for you. I hope you realize that the only thing between your next heartbeat and the beating heart of the universe is your willingness to let him love you. And when you get a chance to sit it out or dance – I hope you dance!