

You Want Me to Imagine What?

Epiphany

Jeremiah 31:7-14; John 1:1-18

I find the topic posed today by our material, kind of unbelievable. I am a Mennonite, and you want me to imagine what? God's Dance? God dances? You have got to be kidding me. This has to be some kind of joke. Like the one about why Mennonites don't have sex standing up. Because we know what that leads to, and God forbid that we should . . . gasp . . . dance. This is the kind of thinking that I grew up with. Dancing is evil. Don't do it. Except I secretly loved to dance. Moving my body to the music. Feeling the thrumming beat inside my body. I loved everything about it. But dancing, according to my church, and essentially anything to do with my body was well, not a good thing.

Which brings me to this question. If the body is sinful, wrong, and to be abhorred, then why on earth would God come to earth and inhabit a body? That makes absolutely no sense at all. Except, if the assumption about the body being sinful is the thing that is actually wrong. "In the beginning God created . . . " bodies, and He said, "They are good," and he even said, "They are very good." Our bodies are good, created by God as good and right and worthy. It really is a shame, and might I even say, a sin, an awful sin, that we have denigrated the body so much in the church. "We" think we have to be the "body" police. Every organized religion has done something in that vein. But Jesus talked about the body all the time. Yes, I know he was talking about his followers, but the fact that he used such an analogy in the first place is telling. Being a body is a good thing, yes, even a holy thing. Jesus came from God to earth, and Jesus had a body, a human body. We may have sanitized the story somewhat, have you ever noticed that Christmas Carols like to make the birth of Christ all neat and tidy. No crying, no blood, no mess. I recently saw one artist's rendition of Jesus birth. It was nothing like the typical, sweet, and perfect image we see on Christmas cards. Mary was screaming her head off, and Joseph was down there between her legs, with all the blood and usual fluids associated with childbirth, bringing God's son into the world just like any other baby. And Jesus arrives with hollering and wailing , just like any other baby. Jesus experienced all the things with his body that we do with ours. I find that both amusing, and comforting. Which I think was the whole point. God knows that we need role

models that we can actually relate to. So when we sanitize Jesus, make him more divine than human, we actually make him less accessible to people, which is a sin, one that Jesus pointed out to the religious leaders, and they killed him for it.

I have spoken before about the visions that I receive. One night, I received this vision. God took me up into the stratosphere, and away to the beginning of time. There I saw the Spirit, a corporeal being, meaning God had a body, a presence. And God was creating the world and the universe and everything in it. And God was taking part of God's self and throwing it out into the empty space, and things came to be. God was taking part of God's own being, God's own body and making everything from it. Our bodies, in fact, every single thing in the natural world is made up of God stuff. Every single thing, filled up with the being of God, full of love, just as God is. But we forget that most important fact. So if you needed any more assurance that our bodies are holy, well there you go.

But what about dancing? Does God dance? The Jeremiah passage seems to suggest this is so. Listen again to these words.

This is what the LORD says:

“Sing with joy for Jacob;
shout for the foremost of the nations.
Make your praises heard, and say,
‘LORD, save your people,
the remnant of Israel.’

⁸See, I will bring them from the land of the north
and gather them from the ends of the earth.
Among them will be the blind and the lame,
expectant mothers and women in labor;
a great throng will return.

⁹They will come with weeping;
they will pray as I bring them back.
I will lead them beside streams of water
on a level path where they will not stumble,
because I am Israel's father,
and Ephraim is my firstborn son.

¹⁰ “Hear the word of the LORD, you nations;
proclaim it in distant coastlands:
‘He who scattered Israel will gather them
and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.’
¹¹ For the LORD will deliver Jacob
and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they.
¹² They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion;
they will rejoice in the bounty of the LORD—
the grain, the new wine and the olive oil,
the young of the flocks and herds.
They will be like a well-watered garden,
and they will sorrow no more.
¹³ Then young women will dance and be glad,
young men and old as well.
I will turn their mourning into gladness;
I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.
¹⁴ I will satisfy the priests with abundance,
and my people will be filled with my bounty,”
declares the LORD.

Notice this line, “This is what the Lord says,” The Lord says that there will be dancing and rejoicing. The Lord declares that “They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord— . . . Then the young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well.” Young and old. So don’t think you don’t have to dance because you are too old to learn the steps. There is going to be dancing. God says it will be so, and so it will be so.

But what does the dance of God actually look like? . . . Any ideas? . . . It looks like a partnership, a relationship. Consider the Trinity. The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. “I am in the Father, and the Father is in me.” “I will send the Holy Spirit to help you.” If you know me, then you know the Father.” These three figures, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, are in an intimate relationship, a three-way dance. They work together. They move together. Their hearts beat as one, together, in the same time, like a dance. One, two, three. One, two, three. A Holy Waltz. God isn’t doing the two step, while Jesus does a swing. The Spirit doesn’t do the Samba, while God the Father does ballet. They step

together, creating new dance steps for us to follow together. Because if they dance as one, then we too are called to dance as one with them, the Trinity, and with each other.

Perhaps us Mennonites were not too far off the mark after all with our Circle Games. We called them games instead of dances, but seriously, they are movements to music. Sounds like dancing to me, but hey, we humans like to argue semantics. When Doyle and I got married, none of my siblings had a wedding with dancing. That was just unheard of, but I really wanted to dance at my wedding. I wrote a first waltz and everything. But, we needed to appease the more conservative people of our families, so we arranged to play some Circle Games before any dancing. We did the "Miller Boy." You know the one. The men walk in a circle on the outside, the women walk in the reverse direction on the inside. At one point the music stops, and the "partners" have to find each other. Chaos ensues, with much laughter and friendly pushing and shoving. The man drops to the knee and his partner sits on it. The last couple to find each other are eliminated and so the game continues. Funny story, when we played it at our wedding, I had the train of my dress looped over my wrist. As I ran to find Doyle, someone else ran between my shoulder and my wrist, tripping on my dress, and causing me to land flat on my back on the floor. Now everyone is standing over me and worriedly asking me if I am okay. I can hardly speak, not because I am not okay, but because I am laughing so hard. Because people, DANCING IS FUN! One of my fondest memories. Just saying.

And what are the qualities of God's dance? Well, it is a dance of relationship, as I said. But as in every dance, someone has to lead. God leads and everyone else follows, not because we have to, but because we want to. If we want to participate in God's dance, then we need to be paying attention to where God is moving, the subtle nudges. Think about that. How does the one who is following know where to move next? They pay attention to the signals their partner is giving them, the pull and push of the rhythm. And they have to let the leader, lead. If I constantly fight the one who is leading, the dance is disrupted. It is in surrendering to the leadership of God that I can be truly free to express myself. Have you ever watched a ballroom dance competition? The woman in the partnership is not a ragdoll. Her partner doesn't just throw her around aimlessly. She expresses her artistic flair within the structure and parameters of the dance. Her partner supports and encourages her, so that she can soar. That is the true beauty of God's dance. When we move within God's leading, then we can soar, excel, and become our true selves.

What better place to be than to be held within God's embrace? Can you imagine this? God leading, holding us close to his heart. We place one hand on God's heart, let the rhythm of his heart set the beat for the dance. The warmth of God's love fills us with a joy we had not know existed. We look around and notice others dancing, our brothers and sisters, all of nature joins in with shouts and songs of praise. The music swells and we are carried away with the beauty of it all. We take a step to the right, to the left, and God spins us around in an elegant twirl. This is God's dance of love. Can you imagine it? Will you join in? Come, join the dance.

~Valerie Wiebe
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