

## Two Dances

Saint Paul's Cathedral, San Diego  
Proper 10B (RCL); July 12, 2009  
Scott Richardson +

Gracious God,  
Let these words be more than words and give us the spirit of Jesus.  
Amen.

We are witnesses to two dances in today's readings. The first is led by David as he enters the holy city carrying the Ark of God. The people understand the ark to be God's dwelling place on earth. David, drunk in the spirit, approaches Jerusalem not as royalty but as something more akin to a whirling dervish. He has shed his formal garments and – let's be honest – prances about in his undies. Lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets, cymbals, trumpets, shouting, even animal sacrifice – an unbelievable roar rises up.

Michal, aware of the raucous celebration, chooses to de-participate. She despises David and it's not hard to make her case. She is Saul's daughter and David's wife. David is returning to the city – after an extended absence and Saul's death – to claim his place politically and to reclaim her. Unfortunately, during his time away, both remarried. Nonetheless, she is brought back to the city against her will and her beloved second husband is sent packing. So, as she watches the procession pass by, Michal is both scandalized by David's bizarre behavior in the moment and deeply resentful of his power to reshape her life to suit his whims.

The second dance occurs in the gospel and in the midst of a bacchanal. Salome, a young girl, puts on quite a show for King Herod and his buddies – all of them drunk, no doubt, but not in the spirit. The men are so lit up by this performance that Herod, carried away, promises her the moon. After consulting her mother Salome demands a smaller orb – the head of John the Baptist. Her mother, Herodias, has grown tired of what sounds to her like John's puritanical badgering. Herod, at first slobbering and now embarrassed in front of his mates, delivers.

So let me ask - who needs reality TV when you have the Bible? And, more importantly, how do we hear these stories these days, when our gender, domestic and relational roles are so radically different than those of our spiritual forbearers? I've been reading commentary this week on these two lessons and, not surprisingly, I've discovered there's still a strong wave of anti-woman bias in the way the church interprets stories like these. Michal was too much like her father, unstable. She may have worshipped idols. She let her love for her husband grow cold over the years. She misunderstood the importance of the moment. There's little about the fact that she was repeatedly given in marriage

for political purposes, used by various men as a pawn to establish military alliances.

And that same bias is written into Mark's account. Herod, we read, feared John as a holy, righteous man and protected him, but Herodias is depicted as a shrew, a plotter, a murderess. Let me be clear; I'm not defending Herodias right now, nor Salome, but I am asking questions about how these texts are framed.

When I raise these questions with my female colleagues it piques both their interest and their dander. I don't blame them – even as we celebrate the advances women have made in the church we also acknowledge the distance we have yet to travel. Katharine Jefferts Schori is our indeed Presiding Bishop but, of the top one hundred Episcopal churches in the nation according to size, only four have women now serving as rectors. We've been ordaining women since the mid- to late-70's and I believe there are more women currently enrolled in our seminaries than men, but it's also true that in 2007 women, on average, made \$10,000 less per year than men.

Now it might be tempting for some to simply say, "Well, that's the way of the world." But that's not our way; that's not the way of the reign of God that Jesus proclaimed and embodied. The baptized are far more concerned with how things might be rather than with how things currently are. We hear echoes of Paul: "In Christ there can be neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, male nor female." The baptized are spirit citizens in a world where all are loved and appreciated equally, where difference is often celebrated but never exploited.

And, as always, there's more to say. Speaking personally, I esteem my sisters in ministry, lay and ordained, not only in response to the gospel demand for justice but also because I know that I cannot live the abundant life I desire apart from the gifts women bring to the community. In the same way that I can't know things about myself, things to which I'm blind, unless someone reveals them to me, so, in like manner, there are things I cannot know about my God unless, on occasion, I get glimpses through a lens other than my own. My friends of the other gender offer that, if I have eyes to see.

Here's an example: I began this homily by questioning the frames of two of the biblical narratives regarding women; I would not have known to do this except that feminist theologians revealed the issue previously in their research and writing. And once you see how that works in one domain the applications suggest themselves in many others: race, ethnicity, class, orientation – the list goes on.

Now let me say that in an even more direct way: Liberation Theology – a way of understanding our faith to which I am deeply attracted - intends to liberate everyone. When Dorothy Day, champion of the Catholic Workers Movement, took to the streets on behalf of the indigent poor in New York she knew that she

would be provoking many in her church who did not share in that suffering. But she also knew that all are spiritually impoverished when any are materially afflicted. She knew that the outward and evident suffering of the poor was mirrored by the inward and mostly hidden suffering of those who sought to ignore them. That value is shared by any and all who seek liberation in Christ. We believe that when the wounds in our social lives are finally healed then much will also be made well spiritually.

And that, I think, is what our aforementioned Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, was getting at when she addressed our General Convention earlier this week. She said that it is the Great Western heresy to believe that we can be saved as individuals or that any of us, alone, can be in right relationship with God. That, of course, drew fire in the blog-o-sphere but I tend to side with our PB. I do believe that it is very important for individuals to surrender their lives entirely to God. I also believe that, on earth and in heaven, none are saved until all are saved. We are all in this together – and no one knows that better than my revered sisters in Christ. Amen.