

The Lutheran pastor said that we could not go to dances, so my dad said that we would become Church of England. So they did. The older daughter some thirty or so years later was the secretary of the MU. The younger, and partially deaf daughter, learnt music and played the organ once a month.

We could speculate as to why the Lutheran pastor took the line he did in an age when dances were one of the few social events in a small rural town. I assume the pastor thought the dancing might lead to immoral activity.

Dance is a connection between the Old Testament and the Gospel readings today. Yet the dances are for different purposes.

King David is dancing to celebrate taking the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. David offered sacrifices as a priest dressed in a linen ephod. Kings in the Ancient Near East, as we speak of that region for those times, often took the part of a priest in offering sacrifice. It highlighted the importance of the religious nature of the kingship as well as bringing the political and religious spheres together. David's purpose of taking the Ark of the Covenant, the religious symbol of Israel, into Jerusalem was to bring together in one place the religious

and political dimensions of the nation's life. So, after the sacrifices, he danced. We may think he was ecstatic.

If you continue to read the story you will find that his wife, Michal, was unimpressed. She saw that he was "before the eyes of his servants' maids as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself." (II Sam 6:20). We hear in those words the voice of the prude, the morally upright, or possibly the prurient mind. It is not to say she did not have a point to make about the dignity of the king. Any ruler or potential ruler, no matter what name they go by: king, president, chancellor, prime minister, needs to be dignified in speech and action if they are to have respect. *[Something a number of leaders we hear about too much, need to learn]*

King David came to be seen as the ideal king and generations after him looked for another Davidic figure.

Herod Antipas was not the most agreeable of rulers. He was not strictly a king but a ruler under Roman authority. Some of the details in the gospel reading today differ from the gospel of Matthew and with the account of the historian Josephus. These details or confusions need not detain us but in a way they authenticate the essential story.

Herod is scared. He hears about Jesus and for some reason he thinks this is John the Baptist whom he had

beheaded. There was something about John that set him apart from other preachers. He had talked with John in the prison in his castle at Machaerus. [*pronounce: Ma-kay-rus*] Herod Antipas may also have tried to observe the ancient rule, ‘you don’t kill a holy man’ even though many prophets, as Jesus said, were killed.

Then Herod Antipas had a birthday party. Whether it was another debauched party, for which the Herod family was famous, is unimportant. What happened at that party is important. Herodias, the wife of Antipas, had a daughter who danced for the guests. This daughter was the child from the marriage of Herodias to the half brother of Antipas. “In the Middle Ages, Herodias’ daughter was usually imagined as a very young girl, and her dance was depicted as a kind of acrobatic display with cartwheels and backward flips. Through time artists imagined her as older, with a more rounded figure, and her dance more sexual, more alluring. The story came to be about the inability of an old man to resist the wiles of his scheming wife and her attractive daughter.” (*Expository Times* June 2009 p.445)

Herod was so pleased with the daughter that he promised to give her up to half his kingdom, which was not his to give as he was under the authority of the Roman Emperor. If the daughter was a young girl he may have thought she would ask for something like a piece of

jewellery. However, he made this rash promise. Whatever the age of the daughter she consulted her mother and the response was immediate: "The head of John the Baptist on a platter."

We might shudder. Yet we read of such things again and again in the annals of history. We may not see such decapitation in newsreels but we see horrendous scenes of inhumanity, where militia bash, shoot and knife men and women speaking out for reform. People in power will resort to such tactics when people rightfully challenge the improper use of their authority. The secret police, the loyal battalions, will take such action to maintain their own power as much as the leader's.

In her own way that is what Herodias did. She was furious with John the Baptizer for his condemnation of her marriage to Antipas. She held a grudge against him. A grudge will colour our thoughts and actions. Dancers may evoke pleasure or prurience. The reaction is in the mind of the onlooker and sins of the mind come before sins of the word and deed.

In whatever way we want to think of the reactions of Michal and Antipas to the dancers, we too are caught up in a dance. It is the way Sydney Carter expressed the life of Jesus, in the hymn "I danced in the morning." The hymn speaks of the joy of creation, the pain of sin,

the tyranny Jesus experienced and the exaltation of the resurrection. It is the way he spoke of our way of living the Christian life. Through the hymn Jesus says, "I'll live in you as you live in me" which we understand is through Baptism and Holy Communion.

As with any dance there are possibilities of misinterpretation. There are those who would make criticism of that way of life and our trying to live it to the full. There are those who would be judgmental of what we say and do; make rash promises about how they will share in the life of the Church and her Lord; are furious about things the Church says about the nation's choices for life. \*

We know that as we dance with the Lord of the dance moving us to go with him and in his way there will be difficulties, sorrow, and pain yet we also know there will be exaltation as he leads us. \*\*

Year B

Pentecost 8 / O.S. 15  
St. Peter's, Brighton Beach

15.7.2018

*\* This is the kind of reaction of Michal to David's dance. It is seen as the dance of a person that is to be like the daughter of Herodias, done to please people.*

*\*\*This is the dance of David. It is the dance to please God.*

Some detail from B Pentecost 6/O.S. 15 12.7.2009 Mount Barker WA