

“A time to dance”  
II Samuel 6:12-19  
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October 2, 2022

Are you thinking what I'm thinking? That is a dangerous thing for a preacher to ask a congregation on a Sunday morning. I hope you are thinking what I am thinking, but there is the real possibility that what you are thinking is not what I am thinking. You might be thinking about that big and bountiful breakfast you just ate and how good the bacon and eggs and waffles and fruit tasted. You might be thinking about lunch, or brunch, maybe going to a nice restaurant on the water, relaxing as you enjoy a beautiful fall day in New England. Asking what you are thinking during football season, now that is really dangerous. You might be thinking “I hope the pastor remembers we have to get home and get settled in our recliner and watch the pregame show.” Oh, the question I am asking is fraught with all kinds of bad possibilities. Nevertheless, I am going to ask, “Are you thinking what I am thinking?”

Here is what I am thinking. David, the king, is acting very strange. In fact, this whole scene described in II Samuel chapter six is hard to fathom. There is a box of some sort being escorted by quite a contingent of people. I say quite a contingent because one of the ones escorting that box is none other than David, the great king of Israel. The procession is slow, I mean sloooooowww. Every six steps they all stop and sacrifice a bull and a fattened calf. Every six steps. Pardon the pun, but this parade where a bull and a calf are sacrificed every six steps is mooooving very slowly.

But the pace of the procession is not even the most interesting aspect. David, the king, is dancing, as the bible says, “With all his might.” So here is this box, being escorted by the king and his mighty contingent, stopping every six steps to make a sacrifice, and the whole time King David is dancing with all his might. Please tell me you find this at least mildly interesting. Something big is going on. And yet not everyone is in step with this passionate procession where the king is dancing with all his might. The king's wife finds this all rather

embarrassing. She is watching from her window. When she sees David dancing with all his might, she turns her nose up at the whole spectacle. Apparently, watching your husband dancing with all his might while dressed in what the bible delicately describes as a linen ephod does not sit well with David's wife. What she sees is not a linen ephod, she sees that her husband is half-naked, in full view of the whole crowd, which included many young servant girls.

David, instead of accepting this as some well-appointed advice and counsel from his better half, basically telling him to stop all the dancing and put some clothes on, instead of accepting the well-appointed advice and counsel of his wife, David doubles down. "I will become even more undignified because I am dancing and celebrating for the Lord." No apologies from David. He is all in with the sacrifices, with the procession, with the dancing, and even that teeny tiny linen ephod. David is going to keep right on dancing with all his might. All these great and grand happenings are directly related to the box that is being carried into the Holy City of Jerusalem.

So, let me ask you once again: Are you thinking what I am thinking? Here is what I am thinking? What is in that box? Whatever was in that box caused such a grand and glorious parade, such celebrating and sacrificing, such dancing and such delight? What is in that box?

Is it a football? Fans of the University of California at Berkeley might think a football would set people to dancing. On November 20, 1982... On November 20, 1982, the UC Berkeley football team, referred to as Cal, won an improbable last-second victory over Stanford when Cal completed five lateral passes around members of the Cardinal marching band, who had wandered onto the field a bit early to celebrate the upset they were sure their team had won. The Golden Bears scored an improbable touchdown. Maybe even a miraculous touchdown. That day there was a chaotic scene as the Stanford band cleared the field, bewildered at the sudden turn of events, and the Cal fans filled the field, dancing with all their might. David, could it be there is a football in the box? Is that why you are dancing?

Could it be a cardigan sweater? Like the hand-knitted woolen cardigan worn by Marilyn Monroe during her last-ever photo-shoot at Santa Monica beach on July 3, 1962. Someone paid \$167,500 for that cardigan sweater worn by Marilyn Monroe. And that was back in 1999. Who knows what it would go for now, what with a new movie coming out about the life of the famous movie star. If you put a cardigan sweater from Marilyn Monroe in that box, you are guaranteed some people would start dancing with all their might. David, is there a cardigan sweater in the box? Is that why you are dancing?

I have a good friend who had a menu that had the potential to set folks to dancing. It was a dinner menu that somehow survived the wreck of the Titanic. My friend had a few moments of being a celebrity as he would give interviews explaining the whole process of how he came to possess the menu. Google Titanic. You will see people are fascinated with remnants of the wreck. Was it a menu from the Titanic that caused all that uproar and celebration? David, is that what is in the box?

I would not be shocked if it was a wedding invitation. Four times our family has sent out wedding invitations, once for each of our four children. Actually, five times our family has sent out wedding invitations. The first invitations were sent in 1982, when young Julie and Wayne were eagerly anticipating their wedding nuptials. So much joy surrounds a wedding. I don't dance often...at least not in public settings, but when it's a wedding, a wedding for the family, a wedding for our kids, you will see me doing the twist, the mashed potato, the funky chicken, and some dances made up of my own steps and miss-steps. Like David, when it comes to weddings, you find me dancing with all my might. David, is it a wedding invitation in the box? Is that the cause for all this creative chaos?

Could it be something like a reunion? My big brother Danny was the heart and soul of our family as I grew up. He was Big Eb, and I guess the rest of us were the four little Ebs. In the fall of 1979, Danny joined the Peace Corps. He flew to Kenya, where he stayed for the next two and a half years. In 1979 they had air mail, but air mail did not move at supersonic speed. In 1979 they did not have Gmail. They did

not have email. They did not have Facetime, Zoom, Skype or any of that hype. For two and a half years, it was like Danny was off the radar. Almost no contact. I missed him. My family missed him. Finally, in December of 1982, more than two years since our last sighting of our beloved big brother, Danny came home. He was flying into SFO, San Francisco Airport. The whole family could not be there for his arrival, but me and my brother Barry were able to be there. The Eberly brothers were about to be reunited. The plane landed. People started filing out. Standing on our tip toes we strained to catch a glimpse of the Big Eb. Of course, he was not first. Then he was not among the first 20, or 40, or forever. That is how long it felt. We began to wonder, "Did he miss his flight" Then we saw a cowboy hat, but not just a cowboy hat. This cowboy hat looked like it was on springs. It kept bouncing up and down not an inch or two, but two or three feet. It turns out Big Eb was as excited to see his Little Ebs as the Little Ebs were to see him. When we finally caught sight of each other, we were like David. Not the linen ephod part. We were fully and respectably dressed. But when we hugged, we were dancing with all our might. David, is it a reunion? Is it a homecoming? Is it a reconciliation? What is under the lid in that box. I could go on, and you could as well, but I think we are in agreement. Whatever was in that box, it must have been incredibly special. What was in that box brought everything to a complete halt every six steps. Every six steps there would be a sacrifice and a celebration. Escorting that box was a grand procession. Leading the way was the king, the great king, the mighty king. Leading the way was David, dancing with all his might. David, what was in that box?

Like the crazy chaos of the victory on a football field, was it a triumph of epic proportions that caused all the dancing? Is that what was in the box? If that is what you think, you are right. When you open the box, you will find incomparable victories. From that box emerge the dramatic events of the Exodus, that glorious day when the waters of the Red Sea parted. In that box you find the crumbled remains of the walls of Jericho, those walls that came crashing down in such spectacular fashion. That box has some ashes left over from the fiery furnace that

was supposed to burn up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but whose flames only served to ignite a faith that burned brightly with passion.

So, it was an epic victory that was in the box? Yes. You got it. And a cardigan sweater. Well, in the box is an article of clothing of great value, in fact of much greater value than a movie star's sweater. Inside that box is a robe, a robe of righteousness. Everyone who believes in God is clothed in a robe of God's righteousness, not a robe that is given because we earned it or deserved it. The robe inside that box, is a free gift from God, and it represents God's mercy and grace.

Two things in the box? Any chance the menu from the Titanic made it? Not exactly. But speaking of menus, inside that box that spurred such heartfelt dancing were many menus. There is a menu with just one item. The one item on that menu is "Manna." Bread from heaven. Another menu reads, "Fish." And chips. Or bread. I guess that is more accurate. Actually 5,000 menus said Fish and Bread, loaves and fishes. One menu in the box simply says, "Feast", for one day there will be a feast where people will come from east and west and north and south to sit at table in the kingdom of heaven. Oh, the menu that day will include everything the human heart desires, and most importantly it will be a feast celebrating eternal life with God the Father Almighty. Today we are remembering another menu found in that box. There was a night many years ago, a night right before Jesus was arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified. Again, the menu is simple. Bread and wine. Anyone who knows the story reads those two words on the menu and their hearts melt, because we know Jesus took the bread and said, "This is my body given for you." We know Jesus took the wine and said, "This is my blood shed for you." If a menu from the Titanic warrants dancing, what deep emotion swells in the hearts of those who have tasted of that menu, who know that the body of Jesus was given, and his blood was shed so that we could have life. Oh, the box has many menus, and those menus tell of a God whose love knows no end.

If you thought David was doing a wedding dance, you would not be wrong either. Inside that amazing box is a promise that the people of God will be married to their God, that they will have the name Beulah, which means married. Sitting inside that box are the six stone jars filled

with the water Jesus turned to wine at the wedding in Cana. And when all creation is completely and perfectly restored, we will be like the bride who is wedded to the Lamb of God. If that is not enough to start your toes to tapping and your feet to dancing, I don't know what is.

If you are not dancing yet, if the contents of that box have not struck up a chord and thrown down a beat for you, what about this. Inside that box is beautiful story after beautiful story that portray the good news of homecomings and reunions, restorations, and reconciliations. There is so much celebrating it just about knocks the lid off the box. Inside the box is the story of Jacob and Esau putting aside their years of animosity. Inside the box is the story of Joseph breaking down in tears as he and his brothers are reconciled. Inside the box is the laughter that spills out when exiles who have long lived as strangers in a foreign land come home. They sing and shout those joyous words. "When the Lord restored our fortunes, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter." Oh yes, inside the box you have countless lambs who were lost out in a field, only to be scooped up and carried home in the arms of their Good Shepherd. Inside the box is something for everyone who has ever lost their way, for everyone who has ever turned their back, for everyone who has abandoned what was dear, for everyone who has become lost and isolated and separated. Rumbling around inside that box is the good news of a Prodigal Son who one day turned his heart toward home. Despite having every fear that his father had shut the door and turned out the lights, what the Prodigal found was a father who loved him, a father who welcomed him, a father who embraced him, a father who kissed him, a father who covered him with his best robe, a father who prepared a feast. I can guarantee you there was dancing at that feast. It was the dancing that comes when one who was lost has been found, the dancing that comes when one sinner finds their way home, the dancing that occurs when God wraps yet one more of his precious children in his warm and loving embrace.

That is what is in the box. And so much more. The box is what we know as the Ark of the Covenant. Inside the box are the tablets that signify the Covenant, the tablets that bear the Ten Commandments. But

we would greatly shortchange that box if we thought it was limited to just those ten commandments. The tablets stand for God's Word. The tablets stand for all of God's Word. The tablets stand for the Law. The tablets stand for the Prophets. The tablets stand for the Writings. The tablets stand for all 39 books of the Old Testament. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are absolutely convinced the Covenant of God includes the 27 books of the New Testament, the Good News about Jesus Christ, God's Beloved Son, the Savior of the world.

On a morning when King David is dancing with all his might before the Ark of the Covenant, I want to ask you, "What's in your box?" What makes you dance with all your might? What makes you dance with all your devotion. What makes you dance unashamedly, unreservedly, unabashedly, and unapologetically? The bible knew nothing of footballs and cardigan sweaters worn by movie icons, nothing of menus and modern-day memorabilia. But the bible knew of a golden calf, of Asherah poles, of idols of all shapes and sizes. People have always been tempted to put something other than God's word in their box.

The point is not simply to say those things are not worth it. It seems to me the point is to say God's word is worth it. When you have God's word in your box, you have the word that tells you over and over, again and again, through stories of sorrow and stories of joy, through songs and psalms, through testimonies that run through two entire testaments, the Old and the New, and most importantly, through a person, through The Word who became flesh and dwelt with us, when you have God's Word you have the living God who is the loving God. When you have the Word of God you have everything you need. Get to know that Word of God and you will find that you do not have everything you need, you have everything you ever wanted. When the Word of God is in your box, you dance with reverence and wonder, with worship and adoration, you dance with joy and passion, you dance with gratitude and gratefulness, you dance with love and devotion. You dance with all your might before the Lord God who has loved you with all his heart.

Today we dedicate a new bible to be placed here in our pulpit. Let us pray:

*May this bible be a constant witness to the one whom we love and adore. May this word be a witness to the Word, to Jesus Christ, our Lord, and our Savior. This word is the solid foundation of our church, the word that stands firm through all trials and testing, bringing us safe and secure through every storm of life. This word is the lamp for our feet and the light for our path. May we do more than place this word in the pulpit of our church. May we impress these words on our children. May we talk about these words when we sit at home and when we walk along the road, when we lie down and when we get up. May we tie these words as symbols on our hands and bind them on our foreheads. May these words be written on the doorframes of our houses and on our gates. O Lord, in a very real way, in all we say and do, may these words be written upon our hearts. And may this word never fail to lead us to the one who holds every hope in the palm of his hands. May these words lead us all into a loving relationship with Jesus Christ, the one who gave his life for us, so that we might have eternal and abundant life.*