

“So You Think You Can Dance”

2 Samuel 6 (NRSV)

Season 15 of the hit reality competition show, *So You Think You Can Dance*, kicked off on June 4. Dancers from all over the country showed up to impress judges Nigel Lythgoe, Mary Murphy, and Vanessa Hudgens. From ballet to tap to jazz to contemporary to ballroom to hip-hop and breakdancing – any and all styles of dance are welcome. But if a contestant makes it pass Level One auditions and into the “Academy,” as they call it, they have to be ready to kick it up a notch and show their versatility. They must pick up choreography quickly and perform well in vastly different styles of dance, all with a smile on their face and an effortless ease about them of course.

It’s always kind of a bummer when someone who is so good at “their” style of dance is eliminated because they can’t measure up in the other styles. But then again, that is the premise of the whole show. You can’t just dance the way you want to dance, you have to dance the way the judges want you to dance too.

From today’s passage you’d think that King David would make a pretty good contestant on *So You Think You Can Dance* (the Biblical Celebrity version of course) because he dances not once, but twice! Both times he’s dancing before the ark of the covenant (aka: The Lord). The first time it’s a full company number, with the entire house of Israel giving it their all – complete with songs, lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets, and cymbals. I’m thinking Latin Jazz, maybe. The second time David dances it’s a solo number and he’s scantily clad – so I’m guessing it’s probably ballet or contemporary of some sort!

Now David’s dancing has long been a picture of joyous, full heart-mind-body-and soul worship...and rightly so! Given that Baptists love the Bible – I’m not sure where the whole “Baptists don’t dance” thing comes from...because here it is – in Scripture! When you dance, you lose yourself in the moment...which is the point...to not be focused on yourself, but on the other person – or – in the case of worship – on God!

But in David's case what happens after each of his dances is far less joyous than the dances themselves. After the first dance a guy dies, and after the second one, David essentially breaks up with his wife and renders her childless. Sure, there is some celebration and rejoicing about the ark finally making it to Jerusalem, but that genuine worship seems to be overshadowed by some seriously somber stuff. Like the contestants on *So You Think You Can Dance*, David learns you can't just dance the way you want to dance, nor can you "dance around" your faults and mistakes – you have to include everyone in the dance, most importantly, God...and you have to dance by God's rules. Does David do this? Well, let's dig a little deeper and find out.

The whole chapter of 2 Samuel 6 is about how the Ark of the Covenant came to rest in Jerusalem. As you might remember from your childhood Sunday School classes or from the esteemed Professor Indiana Jones, the Ark of the Covenant was a sacred vessel for the ancient Israelites; it is literally where God resided, it was not only the locus of God's presence but also of God's power. Because of this, the

ark was treated with reverence and sometimes even fear.

In 1 Samuel chapter 4 we learn that Eli's sons carried the ark of the covenant into battle with the Philistines and in that battle the Philistines manage to capture the ark and take it to their temple. But while they have the ark, God torments the Philistines and so they send it back to the Israelites.¹ Similar to a game of "hot potato," the Philistines realized that this was not something they wanted in their possession!

The ark is back in the Israelite's possession and it first ends up in Beth-shemesh, where the townsfolk greeted the ark with rejoicing. But some guys looked into the ark, which incited the wrath of God. We're not exactly sure what happened but whatever it was, was bad, because 70 people died. Not surprisingly the survivors said, "*Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? To whom shall he go so that we may be rid of him?*" (1 Samuel 6:20).

Essentially the Israelites became so afraid of the ark that they sent it away to a place called Kiriath-Jearim (which literally means "city of thickets" – maybe they thought

¹ Nikki Hardeman, "David: All Good?" *Faith Element* (15 July 2012), accessed on 15 July 2018 at

<http://www.faithelement.com/sessions/2012/7/7/david-all-good.html>.

it could in those thickets, who knows?) to be cared for by Eliazar (son of Abinadab) for nearly 20 years.

Meanwhile, David is consolidating his political power in Jerusalem – now called the City of David. He is growing ever more powerful as king over Israel and wants to make Jerusalem not just the political center of Israel, but also the religious center. There is no doubt David is doing this for religious reasons, but he also has to understand the power that he will garner by bringing the ark to Jerusalem.² He knows this will “seal the deal” in terms of his fame and his status as greater than King Saul. His motives for power are couched in piety, it seems. (Sound familiar?)

In any case, David decides to bring the ark out of quarantine in Baale-judah (which is another name for the “city of thickets”). Eliazar is not mentioned but two other sons of Abinadab are: Uzzah and Ahio. (I guess the one brother pushed it off on his other two brothers). Uzzah and Ahio are responsible for attending to the ark as they make the trip to transport it to Jerusalem.

Important side note here:

David ordered a new cart to be made for the ark, and this was perhaps his first mistake in this whole ordeal because the ark wasn't meant to be put on a cart. It was supposed to be carried by priests, on poles. With the ark on their backs, the priests could feel the weight of God's presence with them. The only people who had put the ark on a cart before were the Philistines.³ And we know what kind of luck they had!

The second mistake David made was forgetting to offer a sacrifice. As one scholar put it, they were singing and dancing, [but it wasn't really worship] it was really a big racket] because he David forgot the key act of worship when it came to the ark – sacrifice. He wanted all of the benefits of being with the presence of God, but he didn't want to invest in the work that it takes to maintain that presence.⁴

So these two young men, Uzzah and Ahio, were assigned to drive the oxen and the cart bearing the ark. And at some point, one of the oxen carrying the ark stumbles and Uzzah instinctively places his hand on the ark to

² Hardeman, *ibid.*

³ Ken Evers-Hood, “What are you living for that's bigger than you?” *Faith and Leadership* (27 August 2012), accessed on

15 July 2018 at <https://www.faithandleadership.com/ken-evers-hood-what-are-you-living-thats-bigger-you>.

⁴ Evers-Hood, *ibid.*

steady it. The anger of the Lord flares up and burst out upon poor Uzzah. He dies on the spot.

Now, I don't know about you, but this whole incident is troubling. Wouldn't we all have tried to keep the ark from falling? (This was the presence of God after all!) Uzzah's infraction seems like a small one and the punishment doesn't seem to fit the crime. But if we pay attention to the intention of the narrator, we can see that the person writing this story wants to convey something to us about God and our relationship to God. And while we may not understand or feel settled about the storyline itself, we can still search for the message trying to be communicated.⁵

Some scholars suggest that perhaps Uzzah died because David's motives for moving the ark were more about *himself* than they were about *God*. Which is clear by the way he forgoes the sacred rules of the ark for the sake of speed in getting it to Jerusalem. And thus, those that were a part of the process of moving the ark, suffered. We know that often the bystanders and weak people in our society suffer because of the decisions of those who hold all the power. After all, David never recited the rules of the Ark of the

Covenant (that were given generations before these men) and so Uzzah maybe didn't even know NOT to touch the ark. You could make the argument that Uzzah died at the expense of David's irresponsibility and hasty decision making.

In any case, after Uzzah's death, David was angry at God and a little bit of afraid of the ark. He decided that taking the ark to Jerusalem wasn't such a good idea and so he pushed it off on somebody else and sent it to the home of Obed-edom. After it had been with Obed for 3 months and had brought all kinds of goodness and fortune to Obed-edom and his family, David decided that, okay, now it was safe to bring the ark on into Jerusalem. Go figure. And as the ark is bring brought into the city, David is once again dancing. But this time he is wearing basically what amounts to an undershirt or underwear.⁶ There's no question that all eyes would have been on David.

Michal, David's wife, sees him dancing in his exposed state and becomes angry at his display and she tells him exactly how she feels. And then David becomes angry with Michal.⁷

⁵ Hardeman, *ibid.*
⁶ Hardeman, *ibid.*

⁷ Hardeman, *ibid.*

History has presented Michal as the bad guy (or gal) in this text because she disdained David's dancing before God. But was she really upset with the idea of dancing before God in worship OR was she upset with the fact that David was dancing around so many issues instead of truly dancing before God?

Here's a little background on Michal. She's the daughter of King Saul. She falls in love with David. We're told two times that Michal loves David. We're never told that David loves Michal. Saul sees Michal's love as an opportunity to kill David—he sends him out to procure the foreskins of 100 Philistines (*1 Samuel 18*). Saul assumes that David will die, and his competition will be gone.⁸ In *1 Samuel 19*, Michal shows her love by helping David escape her father's wrath. She clearly loves him. So why the upset over David's dancing?

Well, Michal has far more to be upset about than just some risqué dancing. One of the characteristics of Saul's kingship was modesty and humility. David's dance flies in the face of that; nothing about it is modest or humble. Also, David has taken multiple wives since his

marriage to Michal and essentially spent not time with her since then. Perhaps she is jealous. So you can be sure there is some jealousy going on – either in terms of honoring her father or in terms of all these other women.⁹

If you go back and read the exchange between David and Michal the whole exchange is so heated that it sounds like an episode of Phil Donahue! The last verse in the chapter holds the key to who wins the argument. "*Then Michal, daughter of Saul, had no children until her death,*" (*v23*). With this one decision of David's, Saul's bloodline is ended.¹⁰

That is quite a response and it shows just how much David loved power over Michal. There's no reason Saul's line had to end, but the threat and fear of losing power to an offspring of Saul was too much for David.

In this story, I think we really begin to see how complex of a guy David is. Everything David did...he did big and loud. He is held in infamy as the greatest king Israel ever had. He gave us amazing songs of praise and lament in the Psalms and a great example of "full heart-soul-mind-

⁸ Lia Scholl, "Michal," *The Hardest Question* (8 July 2012), accessed on 15 July 2018 at <http://thq.wearesparkhouse.org/featured/ordinary15o/>.

⁹ Scholl, *ibid.*
¹⁰ Scholl, *ibid.*

body worship.” Even still, he struggled with life in his own way. Did he forget where he came from? Did he forget that he was once a shepherd watching over his sheep?

David thinks he can dance – and he can – but the question is: *who* is he dancing for? God and the Israelite people? Or is he just dancing for himself and his own power? We don’t know for sure. But when read in its entirety, the context 2 Samuel 6 certainly points to a hasty, power-hungry King who would rather be the center of attention instead of a God-fearing, humble servant of God’s people.

So what’s the lesson in all of this for us? I think it’s one of those “gut check” lessons for us...you know one of those honest evaluations we all need to have with ourselves about our intentions and motives and the consequences – intended and unintended – of our actions. David is a great guy who did wonderful things – but he’s also human and he did a lot of hurtful things too. No person, regardless of his or her position or power or title, is immune to accountability for our actions. Just because a person does some good, doesn’t mean they can’t also do some bad. And we have to be able to hold one another to account when we see the power of one or

of a few inflicting pain on many. And this gets complicated right? Because sometimes, an action can be both good and bad at the same time.

On a small scale, think of a recent decision in our own community: a worship service time can be convenient for some and not as convenient for others, right? Neither worship at 9:30am or at 10:30am is bad or good, it just is. And it works for some and not for others. This is not about “good or “bad”; it’s about preference and opinion. But sometimes decisions are good for some and bad for others and it’s not about preference or opinion. Sometimes the good is based on power and privilege, not on justice and equality. Both history and current events show us that a policy can serve the needs of some while it fails to serve the needs of others. And in that case, we must ask ourselves – *whose* needs are *greater*? The gospels give us a measure as to whose needs we are to lift up, and Jesus himself speaks these words in Luke 4:18-19:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. To all. When it's a question as to who we should consider first...the Bible is clear: it is the poor, the immigrant, the refugee, the outsider, the hungry, the thirsty, the minority. Jesus was always concerned with those outside the circle of power and often he was critical of those inside of it.

You see, it's not David's dancing that's the issue – it's his intention and motive. After all, David did help some people and distribute food to the people of Israel once the ark had successfully made it to Jerusalem, but at what cost? The cost of Uzzah's life and his wife's love and family?

Whenever we make a decision or support an action or position, as Christians, it is our call to always be asking – “*who could this be harming?*” Because the truth is, we will naturally ask, “*who will this help?*” And more often than not, we ourselves will be someone who is helped if we are supporting a policy or decision. It's human nature to vote and speak on behalf of what serves ourselves. But if we don't ask – who might this harm? – then who will?

Is this not Christ's call? To look out for whoever society is currently deeming “the least of

these” and ask ourselves – are *they* being helped? Because the only way any “dance,” can truly be for God is if it is also equally for the *people* of God.

I wonder, if David had thought things through a bit more the first time, and thought through the implications of his actions on more than just himself – would his dance have lasted longer? And would there have been more people dancing with him? More winners other than just David himself?

In an interview after he won season 11 of *So You Think You Can Dance*, fan favorite Ricky Ubeda was asked what piece of feedback from the judges he would remember most. He answered:

“There is one in particular. I remember when I did my duet with Jaime in the Top 8, Nigel was floored by the way that I could put my technique in the background and allow it to take a back seat to the piece of music and what it means. [It becomes artistry when it's about the story of the Dance and not the talent of the dancer]. That's something that I try to do,

so I'm glad that Nigel noticed that.."¹¹

I love that. It becomes artistry when it's about the story of the Dance (capital D) and not about the talent of the dancer. The same could be said for our faith too.

What Story are we telling by the words and actions of our life? Or what Dance are we dancing? Is it a Story of God's love for *all*? A Dance that welcomes more and more people? A Story that minimizes harm and maximizes help?

In order to go beyond David's "dance" and to Dance (with a capital D) with the Spirit of God, we have to be able to celebrate everyone around us, and invite them to join us. It's an "all are welcome" invitation to dance together, not a competitive performance to beat out everyone else and rise to the top by yourself.

So – do *you* think *you* can dance?

I think you can.
God *knows* you can.

What are you waiting for?

Grab a partner...and dance your

heart out for all the hearts that are depending on you.

Amen.

¹¹ Kevin Fallon, "'So You Think You Can Dance' Winner Ricky Ubeda Is Adorable, and Tired," *The Daily Beast* (4 Sept. 2014), accessed on 15 July 2018 at

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/so-you-think-you-can-dance-winner-ricky-ubeda-is-adorable-and-tired>.