

The theme of the retreat was – Spiritually Dancing with God- and we explored what it means to move with God in the rhythms of our lives. we all move with God in ways that are unique to our life situations and background. We talked about how the Holy Spirit, Spirit of God can lead us in the dance and being aware of when He changes direction or tempo. We also reflected on the fact that it takes spiritual discipline to learn to dance well for us to grow in our relationship with God. We may all be at different levels of proficiency in dancing with God but we are all in the dance individually and corporately as a congregation we are called to dance!

**Yet we would be remiss to merely this topic of “Dancing With God” only as a metaphor for our relationship with God – it then can become a mental/spiritual exercise/discipline...that’s Good, but incomplete. You see not only is dance a metaphor for our relationship with God – but dance, movement is a faithful response to what and who our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is. My question for you this morning ....is if there is room in our theology and our worship, in our practice, in this church for us to not only dance with God, move with the Spirit in our mind and soul but also our bodies? Do you recognize that dance, that movement is indeed part and parcel of responding to God grace...that we can move freely and boldly right here, right now, this morning.**

Shirley Caesar one of my favorite Old School Gospel singers tells the story of a man she calls “Shoutin John”. This man joined what she calls a “dead church” – a church that didn’t believe in movement or moaning in the church – freedom of the Spirit.

Shoutin John upon hearing such standards African American hymns

- “Ain’t no ways tired”
- I Came to Jesus just as I was
- “Give me a Clean Heart”
- Jesus is the Center of my Joy”

Shoutin John would begin to move side to side, he would begin to dance, he would begin to moan, utter words of praise ....when the pastor of the church preached about the grace of God, the love of God, the joy and comfort of the Holy Spirit or a brother

or sister within the congregation would share how though the circumstances seemed overbearing – yet God held them close....He would begin to rock, he would begin to moan, he would begin dance. As you can imagine, shoutin John begin to become a problem in the church. You see this church was what Shirley Caesar calls a “dignified” church – where “important members of the community” attended....“shoutin John” behavior was uncomfortable at best, a sign of ignorance at worse. Surely upon being enlighten, cultured and sophisticated Christian folk do not act this way....something had to done about “Shoutin John” (they tried to hold his hands his legs would be going, tried to hold his legs his hands would be going). The church called a meeting and at this meeting they said things like “Doesn’t John know we dignitaries at this church, Doesn’t John know we don’t act this way in this church, Doesn’t John know we are a enlighten church.....it was decided that the elders/deacons of the church would go to the home of “Shoutin John” and give him an ultimatum. Either stop dancing or he will be kicked out of the church. The 3-4 elders left and took this message to “Shoutin John”. The story goes that when the rolled up upon his southern home they found this rather small, weak old man plowing the ground out in the field of his small family farm. As they parked their fine car Shoutin John stayed on the plow as they came out to meet him in the field, and he said “HOLD MULE.” He turned to the deacons and said “I know why you are here – it is because I praise God to much in your church....because I dance to much in your church” The elders said “and if you do not stop dancing in the church, if you do not stop of that dancing, that shoutin in church we will KICK YOU OUT of our church. Shoutin John with a slight smile on his face said “well put me out, what you don’t

know is that God has been good to me! You see all this land that God has given me yet you do not want me to dance in your church Look at my sons and daughters – I never had to go courthouse or the morgue yet you do not want me to dance in your church...Look at me I am 86 yrs old I am still able to harvest my own crops, I am able to care for myself, yet you don't want me to dance in your church...**HOLD MY MULE I AM GOING TO DANCE RIGHT NOW!** Shoutin John understood and experienced the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman.....

**23Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."**

One of the things that King David is known for in the Bible is his praise and worship. Much of the book of Psalms (songs of praises) was written by him, and the Davidic style of worship has been practiced in Israel for many years, even unto today. Today, the resurgence of dance, and other forms of the arts being used in worship in Christian churches is referred to as the reinstatement of Davidic worship. King David himself danced before the Lord, when he brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. David the writer of Psalms not only wrote about dancing he experienced it for himself. As king upon seeing the Ark of the Covenant entering the city the Bible tells us that he danced, he leaped and danced before the Lord

**2 Samuel 6:14 & 1 Chronicles 15:29**

**David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might. As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart.**

**“And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod.”**

David also refers to dance as a form of worship in some of the Psalms he wrote. For example:

**Psalm 30:11** You turned my wailing into **dancing**; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,

**Psalm 149:3** Let them praise his name with **dancing** and make music to him with tambourine and harp.

**Psalm 150:4** “Praise him with the timbrel and **dance**: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.”

David’s Son Solomon perhaps seeing his father running around dancing before God wrote in the book of Ecclesiastes – given wisdom by God takes note of the value or inclusiveness in the experience of this life...

**1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:  
2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,  
4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, 5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,  
6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, 8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.**

The value of dancing isn’t limited to an individual experience of praise to God – the people of Israel collective recognized that Dance, that movement is part and parcel of how we are to naturally respond and give praise to our awesome God! Perhaps the question shouldn’t be why is “shoutin John” dancing – perhaps the more appropriate question is why am I, why are we not joining in on the dance? The Prophet Jeremiah in chapter 31 prophesies that the sign of the coming restoration and deliverance from their oppressors is near completion would be ushered in by – level paths/roads, bountiful –

water, grain, wine, olive oil, flocks and herds, accompanied by a people of prayer, a people of singing.....a people dancing!

**Jeremiah 31:13**

**Then maidens 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.**

Dance is a **invitation** a prophetic sign of a coming deliverance, a sign of restoration, a sign of hope, a sign of the kingdom...dancing

The people of Israel collectively understood that dance, that movement was an acceptable form of worship throughout their history – Invitation to Dance. Where did this understanding begin? The earliest mention of dance as a form of worship in scripture is in the book of Exodus from our reading this morning, when the nation of Israel had just crossed the Red Sea, left the bondage of centuries of slavery, came upon the Red Sea in front of them and their Enemy behind them....and God interceded into history and showed up by parting the sea for them to cross and closing this same sea on their enemy – those who had once held them captive, prisoners, abused them, killed them, tortured them was defeated. Upon seeing this miracle unfold Moses breaks out in a powerful litany of praise to God/ Jehovah Mephalti (Deliverer). It says:

**“And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.” Exodus 15:20**

Miriam and her chorus surely heard the words of praise given by Moses, surely they heard the powerful oratory yet within them there was a clear move of God which understood that sometimes words of praise, songs of praise are not enough every now and then we will have to dance.....**MOSES HOLD MY MULE!** It is important to note that Miriam, the first praise and worship dancer danced by the Sea with the intensity of

feeling and depth of faith that one can say is unique to womankind – but brothers there is hope for us! Far often it is the woman who is left to pick up the pieces of a war torn land, poverty stricken region, violence perpetrated on city streets... yet in the case of Miriam and her praise team their faith had been strong and enduring. So their yearning for redemption had been that much more poignant, as was their joy over its realization and their striving towards its greater fulfillment. It is also interesting that Miriam (the sister of Moses and Aaron) was called a prophetess, yet nowhere in scripture does it record a single spoken prophecy that she brought fourth. However, in her praise dancing she is being prophetic..... in other words the nation of Israel viewed dance as a prophetic gifting, that the spirit in which one dances (like Jeremiah) is **one of being healing, of a coming restoration., of belonging to God** so dance now for the day is coming.....in which we will be in the Promise Land (Already – not Yet) it is in this understanding that removes the notion that one must be in the mood or victorious to dance...

I would be remiss if I didn't note that for some of us Christians are opposed to dance because of what the world has done with it – (though the #1 show is “Dancing with the Stars!) However, just because some dances has been perverted, doesn't mean that we as Christians should stop using it for God's glory....Amen? we as people of the living King has more reason to Dance than the world! **Okay, you might say, but this is all in the Old Testament, not the New Testament.** A Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath.....

**10**On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, **11**and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. **12**When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." **13**Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. **14**Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." Lk 13

Jesus quite possibly broke two taboos that day – one is that he healed on the Sabbath which was to be a day of rest the other taboo he broke is our own modern day taboo for the woman upon being healed she was invited to “DANCE”...at church nonetheless! But what we are learning today is that dancing, that movement is indeed appropriate for Sunday – in fact she moved her body upright for the very first time in 18years! She was free! Jesus didn’t demand her to dance, to move, to even to give praise to Him....Rather Jesus - provided the healing, the space for the praise dance to occur. This woman like Miriam, like David, like Jeremiah was INVITED to Dance... to the question of **WHO CAN DANCE** The only true requirement to be a praise dancer is a willingness to be empty of self, so that you can become full of Him. It isn’t the people who have it all together that God uses, it is the ones who make themselves available to Him.

**“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.” Isaiah 6:8**

- A Invitation to Dance by God was given to the Miriam of Isreal by the sea – and they danced.
- A Invitation to Dance by God was given to the children of Isreal during a time of great turmoil before deliverance occurred and they danced (young, old, women/men)
- A Invitation to Dance by the Son of God was given to the crippled woman and she danced.
- **Today, this week, this month, from this point forward OCMC I want you to know if you didn’t know a invitation has been extended here in this space for movement, for dance in this place.**

**The Question remains is there is room in our theology and our worship, in our practice, in this church for us to not only dance with God, move with the Spirit in our mind and soul but also our bodies? Do you recognize that dance, that movement is indeed part and parcel of responding to God grace...that we can move freely and boldly right here, right now, this morning.**