

“With Great Power: Dancing Together”

On this Second Sunday of Easter, we are entering our Eastertide Worship Celebration Series, **“Dare to Dance Again”**. The theme Scripture reference is from **2 Samuel 6:14a**, **“David danced before the Lord with all his might.”** The “Dancing” metaphor is illustrated by our “Dancers Installation”.

Marcia McFee, the creator of the concept of our Worship Series, has said, “My first career was in professional dance. But you don’t have to be a professional dancer to know the freedom of dancing ... well, at least the freedom of dancing when no one is watching!” She continued, “Each of us has our own ‘groove.’ What’s yours? Head-bopping? Hip swinging? Shuffle? Slide?” ... McFee asked, **“What holds us back from claiming our freedom to really LIVE and to dance our dances fully?”** ... Marcia shared, “One of my favorite country songs (yes, I am a fan of country music!) is “I Hope You Dance” by Lee Ann Womack.” McFee continued, “I used this song in a sermon for an ordination service in the Yellowstone Annual Conference some years ago.” McFee elaborated, “It is a wonderful commissioning/blessing song ... **‘If you get the chance to sit it out or to dance, I hope you’ll dance.’**” Marcia asked, “Can you just imagine Jesus saying these words to the still-confused-and-scared disciples during one of his post-resurrection appearances?!” McFee elaborated, “Even though Easter comes and we are called to live as ‘Easter people’ with no fear of death, this is not always an easy thing for us to do, especially in times of great anxiety.” McFee mused, “But sometimes we have to just let the dance take us ... to allow God’s joy to invade our reality. This is why I call this season ‘Dare to Dance Again.’”

“Dancing demands a free person” is a quote from George Goetsch. His thoughts are, “When we freely join in the dance of life as a community, we leave behind isolation and fear to find strength and beauty in togetherness. I praise the dance, for it frees people from the heaviness of matter and binds the isolated to community. I praise the dance, which demands everything: health and a clear spirit and a buoyant soul. Dance is a transformation of space, of time, of people, who are in constant danger of becoming all brain, will, or feeling. (George Goetsch quote as reported by Marcia McFee)

The painting shown on the screen is titled, **“The Dance of Grace”**. That painting and the commentary with it is both insightful and inspiring. Mark Keathley wrote in the commentary, “The Dance of Grace is not intended to be an illustration of a moment in the life of Jesus 2000 years ago, but rather a present depiction of the delight and celebration which He invites everyone to join in the present.” Keathley, the artist, continued, “I’ve chosen to portray Him dancing with children, for they come to him as they are, with no pretenses, with no performance or sense of duty. Looking in their eyes and knowing every decision they will ever make, whether good or bad, He laughs with delight because they are His.” **“While onlookers watch, their hearts are stirred up to either desire to join the dance or to turn away, but the sheer joy and love that is seen captivates even the skeptic.”** Keathley elaborated, “Too often we imagine we must ‘get ourselves in order’ before we can experience his delight, but his call is simple: ‘Come to me and I will give ...’. Such is the meaning of Grace – when what we need is given freely. Not realizing our need keeps us from what Jesus said He came to do: ‘bind up the broken hearted, proclaim freedom for the captives and to set the prisoners free.’” Keathley asked, “Do you recognize the chains? Do you feel the bondage from the lies? Do you want to be free?” Keathley concluded, **“Let Him do as only He can so you will be able to join in the celebration of His love and the Dance of Grace.”** (Dance of Grace MarkKeathley.com)

Kristin Johnston Largen describes the gift Jesus brings to the frightened disciples and to all of us today, “the peace that brings back into the fold the outcast and the marginalized, and turns upside down the societal conventions of first and last, blessed and cursed, rich and poor.” “Jesus’ peace invites the lion to see the lamb as neighbor and friend, the Jew to speak with the Samaritan and the prostitute to dine with the Pharisee.’ Largen cautions, however, that the Christian ideals of inclusion, love and justice are, ironically, met in every age with ‘rejection and harassment.’ A threat to the powers that be in one age is a threat to them in every age.” (As reported by Kathryn Matthews in “Love Is a Response to Grace” by posted on Weekly Seeds)

The creator of “The Dance of Grace” explained that painting is not an illustration of a specific Biblical text. Yet, its message does apply to our Gospel Lectionary Reading from the Gospel of John. It is important to remember, the setting of this Scripture included the recent betrayal, capture, torture, false trial, execution and death of their beloved teacher, Jesus. **The disciples, not only had great grief over that terrible loss but they also had obvious reasons for overwhelming fear of what the Jewish religious authorities would do to them.** Indeed, the disciples were meeting indoors behind locked doors because of their fear that they would share the same fate as Jesus. Unfortunately, the disciples had not taken Mary’s report of seeing the Risen Lord seriously, so they were living without hope or joy! They were in shock – barely surviving!

Today's Scriptures reports two appearances of the Risen Lord Jesus to his grieving original disciples. It seems it took two tries before the truth really sunk into them! Both times, Jesus started off by saying to them, ***"Peace be with you."*** ***"Shalom!"*** Then, in the first appearance, he went on to show them the wounds in his hands and side. In the second event, Jesus showed them to Thomas, who had missed the first encounter and had rejected the testimony of the others from the first meeting. Thomas had demanded he also get to see Jesus' wounds for himself.

Next, during the experience with the Risen Lord on Easter evening, John reported, ***"The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord."*** I visualize them jumping up and down with excitement and gladness – dancing for joy! When Thomas got his opportunity to examine the Risen Jesus, he immediately responded, ***"My Lord and my God!"*** The translators recognized Thomas' excitement and joy, and thus, put the exclamation mark at the end of his statement. ***"Jesus said to him, 'Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!'"*** The testimony from those two miraculous experiences lead us to also jump or dance for joy!

Kathryn Matthews asked, "What if the way we witnessed and worked and lived actually sought to embody the kind of peace Jesus brought to those frightened, overwhelmed disciples?" Matthews explained, "We sing jubilant Easter hymns and call ourselves Easter people: not because suffering didn't or doesn't exist, but because God in Jesus overcomes suffering and death, and transforms our lives and all of creation." ("Love Is a Response to Grace" by Kathryn Matthews posted on Weekly Seeds)

During the Easter evening appearance after the disciples' response with joy because they had seen the Risen Lord, ***"Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you.'" He went on to tell them, "As the Father sent me, so I send you.' Then he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'" The disciples and we are to let the Holy Spirit lead and empower us to share with everyone the joy we have because of God's defeat of death and sorrow in the Resurrection of the Son of God, Jesus Christ! Our joyous message and acts of the Divine Parent's Agape Self-Giving Love and Forgiveness bring great happiness and joy to all who are open to receive it!*** For everyone dreams of a time when death, sickness, hatred, oppression, and violence are eliminated. Being Easter people, our message is that God through Jesus Christ has shown us our Divine Parent Promises and will one day bring about an end to all of our hardships and suffering!

The theme song for this Worship Series, "Dare to Dance" proclaims our call to:

**Dare to dance with dreamers, sing their song,
Dare to dance their stories, sing out strong.
Dare to dance with freedom your whole life long.
Dare to dance again.**

**Free the captives, heal the blind.
Leave the fear of oppression behind.
Walk on boldly, take a stand.
Let's walk on New Jerusalem.**

**Break the silence, spread the word.
Let the voice of liberation be heard.
Walk on boldly, take a stand.
Let's walk on New Jerusalem.**

Marcia McFee joins in calling us to "Dare to dance, even in the midst of fear and suffering. Dare to dance an Easter dance of the promise of resurrection." She says, "If you've found your desire for dancing lacking lately, dare to dance again with the assurance that sometimes if we put one foot in front of the other in the presence of other daring dancers, we'll eventually 'catch the Spirit' of new birth: the Pentecost Spirit."

With the Great Power of God's Agape Love, Forgiveness, the Joyous New Life in Christ, and the Holy Spirit, we are able to "Dance to Together" in answer to Jesus' and God's Calling for us to Dance with one another and with all people the joyous and loving Good News of our Divine Parent's victory in the Resurrection of Jesus and the Eventual Total Victory in the Fulfilled Kingdom of God! Amen.