

Proper 10B
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Dance Then, Wherever You May Be

The 80's dance film Footloose was one of my favorite movies as a young teen. Yes, I am a product of the 1980s! It tells the story of a high school student, played by Kevin Bacon, who moved from the big city of Chicago to a small mid-western town where popular music and dancing had been banned by law. Along with a group of classmates, Kevin Bacon's character battles the local pastor and town officials to abolish the antiquated law in order to reestablish Senior Prom. Like all good 80s movies the plot is both campy and predictable. Not too long ago, I watched Footloose again for the first time in probably twenty years. I couldn't believe Daniel had never seen this classic movie of our generation and so, to his chagrin I made him watch it with me. I must say that you can't help but feel joyful after watching it, especially after the last scene.

All the high school seniors are gathered in a balloon and crepe paper adorned barn right across the county line, dressed in their powder blue

tuxes and sparkly, pastel dresses. The scene, however, begins with a little uneasiness. The music is playing and everyone remains in their seats. Unable to give each other eye contact, no one is willing to be the first one on the dance floor. Then, of course, the hero, Kevin Bacon, arrives with his girl and the party gets going. The great thing about the way this movie ends is that you see everyone, I mean everyone, on the dance floor: the cool kids and the not so cool kids, the ones who can really move and those who are awkward and have no rhythm. They have all joined in as a community in this dance. It is an exuberant and contagious celebration of life.

In two of our scripture passages today we hear stories of dancing, one which recalls that same exuberance and joy, that same celebration of life witnessed in the final scene of Footloose. In stark contrast, the other story reveals the dark side of power and pride which leads not to life, but rather to death. Frankly, it is hard to find any good news in our Gospel story this morning. It is Herod's birthday. Herodias, his daughter, is known for her talent as a dancer, and so is invited to come and entertain his powerful guests. While she dances, John the Baptist sits in prison for calling Herod and the rulers of this world to

repentance. Herodias' graceful gift ends with John's head on a platter - a dance which out of revenge and pride and selfishness turns deadly.

Thank goodness we have our Old Testament story to counter the darkness of the other. David, another powerful ruler, presents his own joy and gratitude before the Lord, in the form of a dance. He has brought to his capital city, Jerusalem, the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark symbolized God's presence among the people of Israel and was a link to their past. As the assembled people process the Ark into the city, reclaiming their identity as well as welcoming God into their midst, David and all the house of Israel begin to dance together. "With all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals," they dance. With wild and wonderful exuberance, they dance. Their dancing turns into a banquet -a shared meal as David blesses the people and then feeds them. The dance and the banquet together become a joyous celebration of life, an offering of thanksgiving for the community they have found among each other and among their God.

Each and every Sunday we are invited to the dance. Now it may not look like the final scene in Footloose or even the procession of the Ark into Jerusalem; but it is still a dance. It is our own version of a holy dance in which we celebrate our abundant life in God with one another.

Jason Sierra, Associate for Young Adult and Campus Ministries at the Seattle Regional Office of the Episcopal Church Center, writes

“Foolishly, unapologetically, and beautifully we dance. We dance up the aisle in our flow-y white gowns. We sing to each other ballads of our common history, punctuated by gestures of stillness, of standing, kneeling, and sitting, of clasping the hands of another. Our bodies, our voices, and our movements become vehicles for expressing our relationship with the divine. And coming forward to the table, we present those gifts, gifts of ourselves, to God and to one another -a feast, a banquet set open to all who would come.”

Everyone is invited to our feast and our dance: those of us who have graceful bodies and those of us who have awkward bodies, those of us who are shy and not so sure about joining in and those of us who have no problem getting right out on the dance floor, those of us who are

always the first ones to be invited to such parties and those of us who rarely receive invitations. By participating together in the dance, we are all freed from sin and suffering, from our own pride and selfishness which hold us captive. The powers of this world can no longer keep us locked up. For our dance leads us into fullness of life, not death. In coming to the table together we not only celebrate our life in Christ, but celebrate our life together as Christ's Body.

Our dance, however, should not remain here in the church. Our dance must be taken to the streets. If we believe the feast is for all God's people, then it can not be confined to this house of worship. Others must be offered the bread of life. Others whom we do not see here on Sunday mornings must be invited to join in. We take our celebration of abundant life outside these doors and become celebrants in our world, feeding others as surely as we have been fed in this place.

"Dance then, wherever you may be. I am the Lord of the Dance, said He! And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be. And I'll lead you all in the Dance, said He!" May we continue the dance with all our might,

the dance first begun by our Lord, that exuberant, wild and wonderful celebration of abundant life. In our awkwardness and in our gracefulness, may we join our Lord and each other in the dance, taking it out in the streets and sharing it with those who need to experience the joy and abundance. Friends, may we never stop celebrating; never stop coming to the feast. May we never stop dancing.