

Sermon for July 15th, 2018

2 Samuel 6: 1 – 5, 12b – 19; Ephesians 1: 3 – 14; Mark 6: 14 – 29.

The Reverend Jemma Allen

Enthusiastic religious people make us uncomfortable.

Now that's a bit of a blanket statement,
but it is certainly a problem in today's readings.

David is dancing before the Lord with all his might.
Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

And then we have John the Baptist. A man full of zeal, who had lived in the wilderness, baptised crowds of people, lived on locusts and wild honey, and didn't really meet the criteria of appropriate behaviour among the people of his day.

Herod was perplexed by him, and yet he liked to listen to him the Scripture of the day says.

Herodias just wants to kill him.

Herod is protecting John the Baptist, but ultimately cannot protect him, and so we get the not very nice story of John the Baptist being beheaded because he was a truth-telling holy man and Herodias had a grudge against him.

People who are full of enthusiasm for God bother us.

Lots of us are pretty polite and quiet sort of Anglicans.

And we are deeply suspicious of the wild-eyed prophets like John the Baptist and we are not sure what to make of enthusiastic dancers before the Lord.

Decently and in order.

That is the proper Anglican way.

And yet...

You knew there would be an “and yet” coming, right?

And yet, the reading from the letter to the Ephesians this morning tells us some pretty extraordinary Good News.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

or here it is in the Message paraphrase:

Long before he laid down earth's foundations, God had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.

Because it is a baptism Sunday at our place, we get to see up close what it looks like when children are the focus of their parents' love. We get to see all that delight, all that pride, all that joy, all that hope for a good life and abundant blessings.

Now not every child gets love lavished on them like that. Not every parent is capable of loving wholeheartedly – parents are impacted by their own family experiences, by their own stresses and struggles. But God is held up to us as the epitome of what a good parent looks like: focusing love on us, making us whole and holy. That is definitely good news.

And it is the kind of good news that makes us joyful.
We are loved.
We are part of God's own family.
We are being made whole, being made holy.
Not the kind of holy that is stiff and formal and not really at ease but the kind of holy that can dance wholeheartedly in joy.

Now I know some of you are not really into dancing,
and some of you come to this church rather than another
precisely because we are not so likely to break into
spontaneous dancing

I'm certainly not suggesting that dancing is the point of this
whole thing.

But you know what joy is like and how it bubbles up:
that feeling when your team snatches victory in overtime,
when your child brings home their first good report card
when the medical news is good
when you get to the end of a work project and you have done it
well
when someone you love gets good news
when you see a family member you haven't seen for a long
time at the arrivals gate

that joy that would make our tails wag if we were a dog,
that feeling that wells up within us,
that feeling of warmth and ease
that feeling of pleasure and delight

what if we let ourselves respond to God,
respond with joy,
to the God who chooses us in Christ
the God who lavishes blessings on us

the God who adopts us into God's family
the God who gathers all things up
out of grace
grace freely bestowed on us.

I just want to say one brief thing about the *riches of God's
grace, lavished on us*
as this morning's reading describes it.

The whole thing about grace is that we do not earn it.
God does not bless us and love us
because we are conscientious
or hard-working
or not too mean
or any other thing.

Grace is for us
because it is what God is like –
love and forgiveness and welcome are for each one of us
has always been for each one of us because that is God's
nature.

Reserved or enthusiastic, warm or kind of prickly,
hard-working or a bit of a slacker, generous or hard-hearted

God lavishes love upon you
calls you a beloved child
marks us as God's own
and through that love
works to transform us
making us whole and holy.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.