

Rich Lusk

Follow up to last week's sermon:

I really appreciate those of you who gave me a hard time for quoting Mick Jagger, Dante, and Stanley Hauerwas in the same sermon. Thanks a bunch! I agree that it was a weird combination - but hopefully I pulled it all together. ;-)

The big exegetical question in Psalm 150 that I left untouched is found in verse 4. What do we do with the call to dance to God's praise? How do Presbyterians handle this? For the most part, Presbyterians just ignore this kind of thing. They -- or maybe I should say "we" -- just close our eyes and hope it will go away so we don't have to deal with it because it makes us uncomfortable. It's all too easy to dodge the hard questions.

And, no, the answer is *not* having Karl do an interpretive dance -- even though he's been *begging* for an opportunity.

I admit to not being exactly sure about this. I'm not certain what the "dance" of Psalm 150:4 should look like in today's church. I think it is *very important* to note that the tabernacle/temple liturgy of the old covenant did *not* include any kind of liturgical dance. None of the sacrifices or festivals called for a dance. So the application is probably broader and less specific than we might think. There is no reason to suggest that dance, narrowly defined, is an element of covenant renewal worship.

Obviously, some churches today do have "liturgical dances," but they generally seem more performance-oriented than Spiritually edifying. They generally do not involve the whole congregation except as spectators and that's a serious problem. If you want to see a ballet, go to a ballet show. That kind of thing seems out of place in a covenant renewal service -- especially since it was not a part of temple worship, as noted above.

In the sermon, I mentioned the dances of Miriam and David (Ex. 15, 2 Sam 6) -- but I don't see much that those examples give us to go by. They do not take place in covenant renewal services that involve the whole congregation (which is to say, they are not analogous to what we do on the Lord's Day). They are linked to specific events, not the regular, corporate worship meeting.

I think one answer -- and I admit this is not a complete answer -- is to take into account the basic bodily movements and gestures that make up liturgical worship. Dance is about motion, and there is most certainly motion in our service: the procession; kneeling to confess; standing to sing, hear God's Word, and pray; sitting to feast around God's table; raising arms during prayer and the Doxology; the recession; etc. These movements constitute a sort of extended "dance." There is a certain rhythm that extends itself to the whole service. The basic movement/trajectory of the service is from kneeling (to confess), to standing (to receive our orders from God's Word), to sitting (relaxed at God's table for feasting). This is the "rhythm" of the liturgy, as we move according to the Bible's sacrificial pattern. The call to dance in Psalm 150:4 is a call to involve the whole person (including the body) in liturgical worship. We do that at TPC -- though, no doubt, we could also find ways to highlight and enhance what we do.

There is obviously more that needs to be developed here. But I think we need to respect the fact that the kind of "liturgical dance steps" I have described above are the primary way the church has seen fit to apply the command to dance God's praise over the last 2000 years. Is that due to a latent gnosticism? Or is it the wisdom of the Spirit? I'm not sure -- it's certainly something that calls for further discussion. But at the very least, I would argue that it fulfills the tabernacle/temple pattern.

The only other line of thinking that occurs to me is one that presupposes a more fully Christianized context than the culture we live in. In many Christian societies (especially where the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox churches are heavily prevalent and influential), there have been "street festivals," usually linked up with events in the church calendar (e.g., Easter processions/parades, Corpus Christi celebrations, Mardi Gras festivals, etc.). This kind of thing is hard for us to imagine because we have largely privatized our Christian faith. Public displays of praise and public liturgical celebrations are resisted. But if we were more open, public, and "political" about our faith, such public "dances" might make sense. That seems to be the way Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox interpreters apply Psalm 150:4 in their cultures.

While I'm on the topic of things that need more work/development....I also think we should take seriously the call of Psalm 150 to use a multiplicity and diversity of musical instruments in worship. As a smaller church, we may not have the talent and resources to employ a full orchestra each week. But it is a worthy goal. We should be open to finding ways to enrich our worship with more instrumentation. Of course, we also need to be *very grateful* for the musicians who already share their talents and training with us through musical accompaniment on a weekly basis. They help glorify our singing and have given us a great foundation to build upon in the future.

Finally, if you want to know more about the 5 Book structure of the Psalter, the use of the Psalter in church history, and the way to interpret the Psalms as the prayers of Christ and his church, you can listen to my Auburn Avenue lectures, "Prelude to the Psalter," available here: <http://www.trinity-pres.net/liturgy.php> (scroll about half way down). The first of those lectures shows the narrative progression of Book 5 in the Psalter, culminating with Psalm 150.