



Rev. George Ragsdale
“Music For Dancing”
December 14, 2008

I'm told that this service is a long-standing tradition of this church. It's also a tradition for many Christians around the world, going back to Christmas Eve, 1880 when an Anglican bishop in England came up with the format we follow this morning: a series of lessons from Scripture, followed by a musical response.

Scripture, response. Scripture, response. You don't really need a bulletin to know what's coming. That call and response, back and forth—it's a lot like our relationship with God. God calls and waits for us to respond. That's sort of the theme running through these lessons: God coming back again and again, calling out to us, calling us to respond.

That patterns makes me think of an anthem the choir sang for us last Sunday. I imagine the words coming from Jesus, just as he is about to be born: “Tomorrow shall be my dancing day/ I would my true love did so chance/ To see the legend of my play/ To call my true love to my dance...”

All our music in church is meant for dancing. You are God's true love. We are God's true love. In all the music, in all the lessons we hear this morning God is calling us, calling us to dance. God sends law. God sends prophets. God sends his only son, to call us into relationship with Him.

I love the metaphor of dancing to talk about relationship with God. So much of the time we think with God it's always got to be this serious, precise exercise. But dancing is artful, playful, joyful... you just move, get into the rhythm, have faith and do something.

Every piece of music (or nearly every piece) has a rhythm, a meter of some kind. As an undergraduate I sang with the Duke Chapel Choir. I remember several times, when we'd be rehearsing a particularly difficult piece—sometimes the most lilting of melodies—the conductor would have us up out of the choir stalls, dancing to get that rhythm, that beat into our bodies, our hearts, our minds. Faith can be like that, too. You just can't sit around and wait for everything to fall into place. You've just got to get into it, move, do something.

Dancing implies a certain intimacy, too. I was watching this kind of silly movie, Fred Claus. Apparently Santa has a brother named Fred. In one scene Fred is trying to teach an elf how to dance. The elf is stumbling over everything and Fred says something like, “What you've got to understand is that dancing is all about connecting.” Intimacy, connection—that's what dancing is about.

I was talking with a volunteer at the Urban Ministry Center this week who counsels homeless men and women. We were standing outside, watching the lines form for lunch at St. Peter's Soup Kitchen and I asked him how he kept from just being overwhelmed by all the needs, all the suffering he encountered. He said, “I don't know. I think it's just connecting with other people: hearing their stories, listening to them, sharing with them.”

Dancing is all about connecting, responding, engaging—loving. Our lives are all about those things, too: connecting, responding, engaging—loving God, and loving each other. This morning as you listen, listen for the one who calls to you—who calls to each of us. You are his true love. He calls you, he calls me to join in the dance. The question is, how will you, how will we respond?