

Malcolm Clemens Young Ex. 15:1-2, 20-1a
Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, CA Z35 Luke 1:39-44
Evensong Honoring Alonzo King & LINES Ballet
Thursday 19 September 2019

Dancing with All Our Might

"Then the prophet Miriam... took a tambourine in her hand and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them" (Ex. 15).

We called our second floor Cambridge apartment Happy Woods. The light filtered in through the canopy of the oak trees and friends were always around. I was a stay-at-home dad during our son Micah's toddler years. Through hot summers and snowy winters the two of us would check out Cuban dance music from the local library, come home and dance with all our might. I can imagine heaven must be a little like that with Tito Puente, Ibrahim Ferrer, Buena Vista Social Club, and the people I love, we will all be dancing with all our might.

Dancing made our children love weddings – and we went to a lot of them. Then in elementary school at basketball practice one of Micah's teammates told him that dancing was for girls. I was so proud of our son for speaking right up about the beauty and joy of dancing for all people.

I didn't realize it but "dancing with all their might" is how the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible describes the way that King David and all of Israel danced when they brought home the Ark of the Covenant. When Michal daughter of Saul saw King David dancing, "she despised him in her heart" (2 Sam. 6:16). She thought dancing demeaned him in the eyes of others (particularly "the servants' maids").

Dancing and opposition to it are more ancient than the Bible. When the people of God escaped from slavery in Egypt they couldn't contain themselves. They danced with all of their might. The psalmist sings about praising God's name with dancing (Ps. 149). In the story of the Prodigal Son the bitterness of the elder brother is magnified when he is coming in from the fields and hears the music and the dancing.

I think that despising dancing is a way that we hate ourselves. It is how we reject the joy that lies at the heart of our being. Today we honor the ministry of Alonzo King and LINES Ballet. Frankly it is in large part because their work brings us closer to God and to the gratitude and joy that we were created by God to share.

This year as our Artist in Residence Alonzo has become a kind of spiritual teacher for me. He has taught me that music, movement and light are the most primary way we experience creation and respond to it. He has shown me how physical gestures are often more profound than words, that what we do with our body has a fundamental effect on our spirit.

When Alonzo says, "my real work is the transformation of the self," he says this as a dance teacher in the deepest sense of the word – as someone who teaches us how to in his words "move through the world." Dance helps us to pay attention to that transformation. The movements of dancing make us who we are. They are one way our body becomes an instrument for discerning the truth.

On your way out have a closer look at the largest figure in the stained glass window of the North Transept. That is David and although he carries a large gold harp, don't forget that he is a dancer. As you go your way say a prayer for Alonzo King and LINES Ballet. They are teaching the world to dance with all our might.

