

Dancing Barefooted

“It’s a gift to make you dance.”

A dramatic monologue of Philip the Disciple of Jesus
Last in the series, *Living the Dance* (a series for Lent)
John 13:12-17

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First United Methodist Church of Royal Oak, Michigan

When the Children Danced

Wet feet on this stone floor reminds me of my childhood by the sea. We used to sneak past the towers at Bethsaida’s city gates and run, run down to the lakeshore where fishermen brought in their catch and cleaned the nets. There we would play and dance: splashing water, wading in, then back to the shore where our feet skipped on hard basalt rock wet and coated with sand.

This night’s wet between the toes on the chill floor wants to take me back to those times, filled as they were with freedom and well-being.

The One Who Sought Me

I had become one of those who fished the Lake for a living. Each morning before the sun sent its first pale light across water and hills to wake the earth, we would be off. The hollow kiss of each gentle wave would tell me I was where I wanted to be: away from the city where the people bickered over the price of goods and Roman soldiers pushed their way through the people. Even the way they walked was brutal.

I wanted no part of the world of dry land. I preferred the breeze of early morning as it filled our ragged sails and pushed our boat as the wooden shaft of oars creaked on the boat’s wooden gunnels. It was the only taste of freedom we had left.

That is, it was the only freedom we knew until he came. Jesus.

One day we stood knee-deep in the water off shore, trying as we might to ignore the children who had taken our place dancing on rocks and sand. The women had just been sent with our catch of fish to market. We were washing the nets with fresh water, preparing them for drying clean so they would not foul. Intent on the last of our work for the day, the sun was burning hot upon our nets.

“Philip! Come here!” There was something about the voice that made me forget this routine I had taught myself to observe without waiver. It was something that awakened my wet feet to play, to dance; so I dropped my net without a thought and came.

He set his eyes on me with a smile that seemed delighted. And he, himself, said this right out loud: “I’ve just returned to Galilee from Jordan and I have *sought* you. I am so happy *I have found you*. Follow me.” There were, I saw, two others already with him; they were friends I knew who had been drawn to the prophet who was baptizing. It seemed they were with him. Jesus.

None of us ever mentioned how we left our fishing behind.

He spoke of the sea we loved: of the freedom we found upon the waves and how God wanted this same peace for all the people all the time. He said that if the world were to be the way God would have it, everyone would be clean as the feet that played in the water. All would know the justice and goodness we could only find upon the waves. All would be well and whole in body, soul, and spirit. Then he said that surely God would bring this to pass.

He had come to make it so.

I ran to tell Nathaniel. Even then, something inside me was urging: “Be one who will let the whole world know.”

We went with him. Seldom back on the water, but traveling mostly on the lanes along hills and dry land: we set out to others to tell them.

The kingdom of God is at hand.

We were with him as he went especially to the people all the other leaders shunned: sinners; people who were broken in body and spirit; and children of God who were so poor they were of no use. These were the ones we went to. These were the ones he was intent to tell: for they *did* matter to God and they *should* matter to the world.

He taught them to pray and to expect the best God would have to give. He forgave them and set them free from shackles of guilt. He cleaned them; he cleaned us all from

the filth of selfish jealousy. In place of these things that corrupted us, he filled life with the power of his love. It came without price, but it laid on us an expectation to live differently...O so differently than we had ever lived before.

In the face of all I was seeing, you'd think that I could expect to see some miracles, wouldn't you? You'd think that I would see no obstacle as too hopeless, don't you think? We had gone to a lonely place on the other side of the Sea. Up on the mountain where he would teach us and we could pray. But the crowds came anyway. They pressed in on us – on him. They were so hungry for his touch and the sound of his voice. They craved the lessons of God he'd teach. There were thousands.

But the hour grew late. There was hunger and an air of sourness that grows when stomachs gnaw within and there's nothing to satisfy the need. He called me over and asked a question that I think now was a test: "Philip – where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" I looked at them: all of them without means and there were so many of them. I thought of Bethsaida and my preference for the sea. I saw them and I felt only despair. Great need: with no means to change it. Where was my boat and where was the water?

"The hour is late, Master," I said. "There's nothing to do. Six months wages would not raise enough money to give all these with even a little food."

It was Andrew who guessed at what possibilities lay in the gifts that were at hand, meager as they were. "Five barley loaves and two fish – a boy here is willing to offer them." So Jesus took what there was and he blessed them. There was a miracle in it. They all were fed.

And I'd like to think that instead of failing the test...I learned from it.

I had to speak of it. Deliverance was waiting to break forth.

You do not need the sea to be free. You do not need the water's edge to dance.

He sought me. After this grand banquet he gave the multitudes, *I found even myself compelled to seek them.* And though it started slowly, I began to tell. First it was people like me and like my friends who were following already. But my reach grew – I dare say it is growing.

This banquet of his is not reserved for the best of us. It is for all of us. All of God's people. All of the Jews. Indeed...perhaps...all of the world.

One day not long ago I came to Jesus and told him what I heard. A group of Gentiles had heard of him...and now they were asking for him.

He looked at me with an intensity I had never before see. He said all, now, was fulfilled. His hour had come.

Dancing Barefooted Once Again

Here we are in this room above the street. No servants to care for us. No host, save the one who sought me and would be my Master, my Rabbi, my Lord. And here we sat to eat while the city churned with mounting hatred. Tension among us as, for the first time since he came to us, we felt fear.

Jesus rose from the table and wrapped a towel around himself like a servant. He got himself a basin while we sat, puzzled, unmoving. Then he went to each of us untying sandal after sandal and washing the day's caked dirt off each foot.

Water.

He came to each of us.

He sought each of us.

He sought me.

He washed me.

And he loved me.

Then we had our banquet.

"Don't ever let your hearts be troubled," he said. "Believe in God: believe also in me. In my Father's house are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will

come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going..."

Don't let your hearts be troubled...Believe in God, believe also in me...

Could it be that the peace he brought us was peace that came straight from God? Could it be that there was something lasting about this freedom he so often won for us and for people? Could it be that he had done what no one had ever done before in all the world: could it be that all this came because he had *seen* God?

"Show us the Father," I said, "show us and we will be satisfied."

He looked disappointed and asked me, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me...*has* seen the Father."

Now I look at my feet: clean and wet on this cold stone floor like the feet that danced on a rocky shore. He sought me and found me in order that this freedom and joy might be mine.

Only it's something lasting. Something...permanent, like a gift we shall always be given. A gift I can take to the marketplace and never lose. A gift...I must tell everyone.

A gift...to make you dance.