

Shall we Dance?

By John Blossom

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[PRAYER] Good morning, South Meriden Trinity! Good morning friends and neighbors! This IS the day that the LORD has made...[let us rejoice and be glad in it!] Well, I am not part of the furniture here yet, but it seems that folks are getting to know me, and I am getting to know you, and some of the people in our neighborhood. We had an awesome prayer walk last week, and it felt so good to be walking the streets of our community together, praying for people and places in the name of Jesus. This is a world that needs to be touched by faith, and I hope and pray that we can grow together in ways that can make that possible here, in this place.

This is my honeymoon time as your Pastor, and while I know that there is a lot of love and encouragement coming my way, I know that I am going to have my awkward moments. Like, how do you get the TV monitor to turn on? Oh, you don't really have to do a thing, it's just on with a blank screen until you plug the computer in. Doinnng! Lesson learned. Or realizing that the picture that I chose for the bulletin cover doesn't have enough contrast to show up on colored paper. Got it. Right.

So yes, I know that I will grow into this role step by step, a little bit like going to dancing school when I was a kid. It was going out of style even then, but my parents made me put on this itchy gray suit, a clip-on tie, dress shoes that pinched my feet, and I went to a stuffy dance hall, trying to learn dance steps like the waltz, the fox trot, the cha-cha, and, when we got really daring...the lindy hop! And being short while the girls were getting taller, well, it was awkward!

Now, there was a reason why we went to dancing school back then. The reason was something that we don't talk about much these days. The reason was to have skills for what people called, "courtship." We were supposed to get to know our potential dates or mates in a formal kind of way first, and formal dancing was an important part of that ritual many years ago. By the time I was a kid, formal dancing for courtship had pretty much disappeared, even at proms, but even today, we go through rituals of courtship to get to know someone better in a sort-of respectful way.

Thousands of years ago, courtship was often very elaborate and formal. We can see in today's story in Genesis that Rebekah's selection as Isaac's wife was the story of God's role in a formal courtship. Women and men usually didn't get to know one another socially before they were married. So, it's not unusual that Abraham's servant goes off to the land where Abraham came from to find a suitable wife for Isaac, to fulfill God's promises for generations of grandchildren for Abraham and Sarah. Abraham wants just the right kind of woman for his son - from the right family, the right place, with the right attitude. So the servant goes to the city of Abraham's tribe, and waits for women to come to the city's well to get water late in the day, as women

around the world do even today.

And by God's grace, a wonderful woman appears - Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel, who offers water to the servant and his camels as a sign of hospitality. This is a woman with a gracious character, and Rebekah's family agrees with the servant that the marriage has been decreed by God. She takes a ring in her hose, a sign of her betrothal, and travels joyfully to meet Isaac in Canaan, where Sarah welcomes her into their family.

This is a picture-perfect courtship by the standards of Abraham's culture. Abraham is wealthy, there are signs of God's favor, Rebekah is an obedient, modest, and faithful bride - what could possibly go wrong? God's promises seem to be completely fulfilled.

Or not. You see, as beautiful as the story of Rebekah's betrothal might be, we know that the story of God's favor was not completely fulfilled by her marriage to Isaac. Generations came and went, and it seemed that Abraham's people began to forget the value of God's promises. The bond of faith in Abraham that God had reckoned as his righteousness began to fade in his children. Faith became their tradition, instead of a relationship with the living God, and their culture became their religion, more than their love of God. The joy of fulfilling God's promises had passed from their hearts.

We know this, because when Jesus, the Son of God, walked on this earth, they rejected the living God walking among them, instead of rejoicing in the living God the way that Rebekah and Abraham's families did. Instead, as Jesus said in today's reading from Matthew, they had become a generation who were like children who didn't even recognize the sound of God's dance among them. The notion of a living faith in the living God seemed dead.

I added the gospel story from John today to our readings, about the Samaritan woman at the well, because it is such a clear contrast to the attitudes and actions of Rebekah, and Abraham's servant. Unlike Rebekah, the Samaritan woman is far from pure - she's been married five times, and now lives with a man who's not her husband. She comes to the well at noon, to avoid the accepted women of the village, who come later. Like Abraham's servant, Jesus asks for water, but instead of offering him some, she gives Jesus some lip! Jesus was calling her to the dance, and she was nowhere near hearing the tune that Jesus was singing, much less following it!

And yet, strangely, and miraculously, it turns out that this woman was exactly the kind of person who Jesus was looking for. Abraham's children, comfortable in their customs and traditions, knew how to sing the songs at temple festivals and in the synagogues, but had forgotten the sound of God's dance that the songs called them to. They were in their comfort zone, assuming that God's promises flowed from Abraham's blood, and not his faith.

The living God would love us all to be people of faith like Rebekah and Abraham, humbly accepting God's commitment to us by faith, and offering God the

same loving and unconditional commitment. But the truth is that our times are much more like Jesus' time, a time when a culture of faith had mostly forgotten how to live the substance of faith, a culture that needed the living God to come into their lives to point them the way forward to a life-giving dance with God.

Instead, sometimes we find ourselves at the well of faith with the Samaritan woman. The water in the well is stale and still, a faint promise of what it used to be, and we're less than comfortable admitting to ourselves why we came to it when we did. Our lifestyles have left the bucket of our souls empty yet again. We know that there's something better, something life-giving, and yet when we're offered it, often we're skeptical about whether it even exists, much less where we might find it. Is it too far? Will it interfere with my Zumba classes? Yet the water at the bottom of the well doesn't taste any better.

My sisters and brothers in Christ, God is waiting for us to look up from that stale and dank water that we sometimes mistake for faith, and to realize what the living water of faith really tastes like. God came to us in Jesus Christ to reveal to us that God's story only began in the times of our ancient traditions, and that the story is ready to come alive whenever we're ready to hear the truth of who we are as children of God. God came to us in Jesus, and comes to us today in God's Holy Spirit, to say, "Do you hear that? It's the song of your salvation. I've been playing it since the beginning of time. I love you, I have always loved you. But I can only dance with you when you're ready to follow my tune."

The Samaritan woman was the first person to proclaim the good news of Jesus beyond the tribes of Israel. She heard God's tune in the loving and truthful voice of Jesus, and all of her brokenness drifted into history. She didn't care that the dance started out awkwardly, because she realized that God didn't care, either. All that mattered is that she got up to dance with God, like a child of God.

Children of God, shall we dance? Children of God, are we ready to let God call the tune? Children of God, are we ready to taste God's true, living water? Children of God, are we ready to feel the joy of true salvation? Children of God, are we ready to share that joy with the world?

God is ready. God has always been ready. God will always be ready. Let's dance! Let's dance! Amen.