

May 22, 2016
Proverbs 8:8-11, 27-31
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“Dancing with the Stars”

Good morning! You probably guessed when you saw the title of my sermon -- you all read the title of the sermon, right? Yeah. That's what I thought; I see you checking out the order of worship. The title of the sermon is “Dancing with the Stars,” and you probably guessed that I'm a fan of the hit TV show of the same name. How many of you watch the ABS series “Dancing with the Stars”? Well, if you guessed that I'm a fan, you guessed wrong. I've never watched the show; I have nothing against the show, or dancing generally I'm just not much of a network TV watcher. This sermon could more accurately be titled, “Dancing *Among* the Stars,” but I thought there might be “Dancing with the Stars” fans out there.

If you're apprehensive at all this morning, let me reassure you that I will *not* be dancing as part of the sermon -- or at any other time. Growing up in a Brethren family is pretty much the exact opposite of Dancing with the Stars from everything I can tell. But dancing is a fine metaphor for what I'd like us to consider together this morning. A metaphor is a way of describing something which is impossible to describe or completely understand. Metaphors can be colorful and grab our attention -- like describing a first date as a train wreck -- or they can be calming, like describing the conversation you had with your friend afterward as a breath of fresh air. Either way, metaphors use something we can understand to describe something we can't entirely understand. So pretty much any image we use to talk about God or the activity of God.

This morning is going to be all about God: God the Father (a metaphor) and Creator (another metaphor), Christ the Redeemer (you get the idea) and the Holy Spirit (see what I mean?) Last week in our

celebration of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples in Jerusalem, I tossed around some metaphors -- while you tossed around colored scarves. Do you remember any of the metaphors for the Spirit? Wind, flame, a dove are some of the most common ones. I want us to continue to dwell with the Holy Spirit, but widen our focus a bit. Today is Trinity Sunday, an opportunity to consider not just the three members of the Trinity--the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- but how they interact and work together. This is pretty complicated theological territory. It caused a lot of earnest discussion and a division of the church more than a thousand years ago, and discussion about God's Spirit will be stirring things up at Annual Conference in Greensboro this year. When there's that kind of heavy intellectual lifting to do, a good metaphor can really ease the load.

You've probably already figured out this is where dancing comes in, as a metaphor for the work of the Trinity. It isn't exactly a biblical image, in the same way the word "Trinity," doesn't appear in the Bible, but there is biblical precedent in a place where you might not expect to find it. The book of Proverbs is in the Old Testament, between Psalms and Isaiah, just past the mid-point of the Bible. Proverbs is a collection of wisdom literature attributed to King Solomon, who was fabled for his wisdom. Proverbs is full of pithy sayings, the kind of things which early Americans got from Poor Richard's Almanac: Stuff like "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." Solomon probably didn't write the entire collection; it was assembled hundreds of years after Solomon died, but it is still associated with him. And it still has wisdom for us.

Proverbs is unique in the Bible because it uses a character to embody Wisdom. This character is a metaphor, of course. What's interesting about this character is that she's a woman. Not just any woman, but Woman Wisdom, who is more precious than silver, and most costly than gold. This Woman Wisdom makes some folks uncomfortable. We've been conditioned not to use feminine pronouns for God. Do you remember the song we sang for the offertory response? The text is taken from this passage, Proverbs 8, but the lyrics change the metaphor from feminine to masculine: *Lord* you are more precious than silver, instead of *She* is more precious than silver. If this discussion is making you a little itchy, you're not alone. An agency of

the Church of the Brethren used a feminine pronoun for the Spirit of God on a publicity piece last year, and Oh my goodness, some folks were upset. They still are. So I want to be sure you hear this: God is not a woman. That's a metaphor. But I also need to say this: God is not a man. Because that's a metaphor, too.

I want to get back to the dance, because I think that can help us. Those of you who actually do watch Dancing with the Stars have seen partners who have practiced for hours, are in synch with one another, and complement each other in their movements. A partnered dance may be athletic and complex, but practiced dancers make it look effortless and natural. Part of what makes dancing interesting is that the partners are different from one another, and have different roles.

What is interesting about Woman Wisdom in Proverbs 8 is that she has been part of the dance for a long time: since the world was begun. She danced in the moon and the stars and the sun -- in the skies and in the deep. She was a co-creator with the master builder, his daily delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race. I think that's a wonderful metaphor of the Spirit of God, brimming with delight and joy and creativity.

I'd like to push that even further: to broaden the dance to be not only among the three persons of the Trinity, but as a metaphor for life. What if living as a Christian is becoming so in tune with God, so inspired by the Spirit, and following Jesus so nearly that life is more like a dance than one long uphill slog. Dancing isn't simple, it isn't mindless, and it doesn't go very well if you don't practice. It's probably inevitable that anyone who dances with a partner is going to get their toes stepped on, especially when they're learning. No one really wants to dance with someone who is judgmental, self-righteous, or critical. I won't dance very well if I make the dance about me. It's better if the dance is about us. But the partners who truly discover delight and joy are the ones who dance for the sake of the dance. They're the ones who discover that the dance is larger than they are. These are the people who find the wisdom that is more precious than silver.

I don't mean to suggest that dancing the Christian life is easy or painless. There are too many people in this congregation who know otherwise. I don't want to deny or minimize any of the pain which you have experienced, or are in the midst of right now. But I believe the wisest gift we can claim for ourselves is the knowledge that God is greater than our understanding. Those of you who were at Bill Birr's service yesterday heard me share what Jan told me: "When you know that God is walking with you, you can get through a lot." We don't have to know all the steps of the dance, we don't have to be flawless dancers. But to attain wisdom, we must acknowledge that God-- Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer -- is the Lord of the dance, and not us. Choosing to live a life that is all about yourself is a set-up for being disappointed and bitter. It makes about as much sense as trying to do a waltz all by yourself. Nothing else we desire will change our lives like being partners in the dance with God.

I want to close by sharing lyrics to a song. It's a song which was important to me years ago before I started my seminary education and was trying to figure out where God was leading me. It was a popular song; there were books and spin-off products printed with the lyrics. Some of you will probably remember it. It was performed by Lee Ann Womack. It's called "I Hope you Dance."

Lee Ann Womack – I Hope You Dance Lyrics

**I hope you never lose your sense of wonder
You get your fill to eat but always keep that hunger
May you never take one single breath for granted
God forbid love ever leave you empty handed
I hope you still feel small when you stand beside the ocean
Whenever one door closes I hope one more opens
Promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance
And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance**

**I hope you dance
I hope you dance**

**I hope you never fear those mountains in the distance
Never settle for the path of least resistance
Living might mean taking chances, but they're worth taking**

**Loving might be a mistake, but it's worth making
Don't let some hell bent heart leave you bitter
When you come close to selling out, reconsider
Give the heavens above more than just a passing glance
And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance**

**God bless you in your daily walk, and may you hear God's call to join
in the divine dance. Amen.**