



**“YOU DID NOT DANCE”**  
**SCRIPTURE: SONG OF SONGS 2: 8-13; MATTHEW 11: 16-19, 25-30**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**July 9, 2017**

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**Song of Solomon 2:8-13**

2:8 The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.

2:9 My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice.

2:10 My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;

2:11 for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.

2:12 The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

2:13 The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

**Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

11:16 "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

11:17 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.'

11:18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon';

11:19 the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

11:25 At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants;

11:26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

11:27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

11:28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

The Word of the Lord  
**Thanks be to God**

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Northern England in 1984 was tense, even violent. Coal Miners were striking—and men were angry at their female Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. Masculinity meant working hard in the mines. And widower, Jackie Elliot, was struggling to raise his two sons without their mother. <sup>1</sup>

One son, Tony, worked in the mines with his dad and was at his side in the strike and in the stand offs with police.

The younger son, Billy, was still young—a young man in training. His father had him signed up for boxing lessons—he wanted him to be tough, to learn what he needed to learn to be a man—if not boxing, then football or wrestling could teach him.

But Billy was terrible at boxing and he didn't care about it either. What he loved to do was dance.

He kept his dancing a secret from his dad and his brother—but a teacher saw his talent and a teenager in town did too—a teenager who struggled to fit in because of his sexuality in that man's world.

Billy ended up at the Royal Ballet School—a first for his working class town. Living into his gifts changed everything—and everybody that it touched—even his dad, who watched in tearful awe as his strong, powerful son, now an adult, leapt onto the Royal stage when he came to see him dance.

“Inside every one of us is a special talent waiting to come out. The trick is finding it.”<sup>2</sup>

That could be mistaken as the moral of the story—that each one of us has a special talent. But people of faith **must** hear in this story another moral imperative—that God made us the way we are with redemption in mind—our gifts are not just special talents that will bring us joy, they are spiritual gifts that can heal the world.

So why is being ourselves so scary sometimes? Why does simply being who God made each of us to be feel like it couldn’t possibly be good enough?

This burden of what we are not is a weight made especially heavy with the way white supremacy and patriarchy have filled us with lies about what is normal, about what is good: that white male heterosexuality is the norm that we must all compare ourselves to. Anything else—a gender identity that does not fit the norm, a sexuality that does not fit the norm, a racial identity that does not fit the norm signals a lack.

The burden of this normativity in our culture is carried around by all of us—including the ones whose identity meets all the criteria of the norm—straight, white, male. The weight of conformity to certain ways of performing this privileged position can be unbearable, even soul killing.

So when Jesus comes along saying things like: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." We need to listen—all of us, every last one of us.

Take a deep breath. Imagine yourself laying down the heaviest burden you carry—the one you’ve held on to all this time, the one you’ve been afraid to let go of, the one you were told you must carry, the one that put the real you into hiding at some point—the one that guards your heart and shapes your habits of mind.

"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Do you hear the rhythm of Jesus’ redemption song?

He wants you to know it by heart.

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The only book of the Bible who centers a woman's voice, a woman's voice unmediated by a man's or by men's experience is the Song of Songs, or the Song of Solomon—ironically given a man's name in some translations to lend it legitimacy—maybe even to help it make it into the scriptural canon.

What is this book of love language, why are these words of a strong black woman, unapologetic about her sexuality, unapologetic about her love for a man that her society has told her is off limits, why is this in the Bible?<sup>3</sup>

God is never mentioned in this book.

It is a book about intimacy, about human affection. And in this book, the female body is not a problem to be corrected, but a celebration of the senses and of the joy and vitality of creation, springtime, and growing things.

Her body is mysteriously powerful and she wants to be loved and to love. We meet her in that very human place. That place where we all recognize our own desires—to be loved and to love.

This intimacy holds a mirror up to us as human beings about how God made us and about what being loved by God and loving God is really all about. And about how we push God away even as we yearn with everything we've got for God to come closer.

It is about Intimacy—about “coming out of hiding.”<sup>4</sup>

Intimacy is not an easy reality—it induces fear as well as desire for more. And so we hide from God, and we hide from each other. Intimacy asks things of us that we are not sure it is safe for us to give.

Intimacy asks us to be fully present, to have to answer to another person, to remain when things are difficult, when things are exposed, to be trustworthy, to be gentle.

Intimacy can speak to us about the nature of God's presence, but only if we get close enough to each other to see God's face and to hear God's voice.<sup>5</sup>

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Pastor Theodore Nicolet<sup>6</sup> faced each day after the accidental death of his wife, for his two young children. Every day he had to work hard to stay out of hell, which for him was utter hopelessness. His life was in pieces and his faith was battered, maybe even shattered.

Bible verses, old prayers ticker taped through is brain, but mostly questions, mostly emptiness. The everydayness and the immediacy of his children's lives are the thread that holds his life together. His little girl prays each night:

*Our father, who arn't in heaven, Harold be thy name.*

And of course it was the same Harold, his children believed, who they sang to on Christmas Eve about the angels—Hark the Harold.

The children told their Dad about their dreams at night—they dreamed about angels. “They are dancing, Daddy.” The angels are dancing.

Pastor Nicolet is outside one day speaking to his friend, another pastor. And he took a broken wooden rung of a ladder and asked his friend to listen. He hit the wooden rung twice against a tree they were standing near.

“What's that supposed to be?” His friend asked.

Nicolet struck the tree again, twice.

“Could you dance to that?” Nicolet asked his friend. “Dance?” his friend asked.

“If the life of faith was a dance, and this was the only music—all you could hear anyway, do you think a [person] could dance [to] it?” (he hit the tree again)

“I don't know what you are talking about.” His friend said.

“I am not sure what I am talking about either,” Nicolet said, “But whatever this is we move around through...Reality ... the air we breathe ... this emptiness... if you could get hold of it by the corner somewhere ... and just peel it back far enough to find what's there behind it... I think there's dancing there. My kids have dreamed it. Emptiness is dancing there. The angels are dancing and their feet scatter new worlds like dust.”

“The whole bloody earth is holy ground.”

The town was worried about Nicolet—a pastor's wife's death brought awkward silences, and strained comments. A taxi driver told Nicolet his wife's death was a real shame and that we'll never really know why it happened.

“Only Harold knows,” Nicolet said. “Who is Harold?” the taxi driver said. “He runs a dance school,” Nicolet responds while gazing out into an empty world.

Jesus couldn't have said it better himself. He did say it with himself. He made it true with the way he consecrated compassion, with the way he loved himself into the lives of the discarded, the despised, the distorted, the disoriented. With the way he told us about our intimacy with God—that we abide with God and God with us.

He was right there—the dance itself. And a whole generation saw instead a glutton and drunkard—the only description of Jesus' body or persona we have in scripture is an insult, a dismissal of him as a joke—someone who ate too much and drank too much, and hung out with the wrong people.

People couldn't see who was right in front of their faces. They couldn't hear the music of his Redemption Song. They did not dance.

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How do we trust a moment, trust relationships enough to come of hiding and truly be ourselves? It's not just joy that is at stake; it is redemption that is at stake.

Being a place of redemption is not about being a safety, it's about FREEDOM—which in the language of faith is about SALVATION—being saved from the ways we destroy ourselves and each other, the ways we grow hard of hearing to the rhythm of our purpose for being here in the first place, saved from the way hopelessness tells us not to dance.

We each bring a part of the song with us—we can't hear it all, only Harold knows it all. But we can feel it opening us up to parts of ourselves long shrouded by expectation, by duty, by despair, by fear. The world needs you to be you, and me to be me—the you and me that God made with something beautiful in mind, the you and me that God made while singing a redemption song.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens... I am gentle and humble...I will give you rest for your souls. My yoke is easy. My burden is light.”

I believe we can dance to that, brothers and sisters. I believe we can dance to that.

Thanks be to God.

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<sup>1</sup> *Billy Elliot* Movie, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> *Billy Elliot* Movie Trailer

<sup>3</sup> Renita Weems, “Song of Songs,” *New Interpreters Bible*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Weems quote:

<sup>6</sup> Fredrick Buechner, *The Final Beast: A Novel*. Harper and Row, 1930.