

THE DANCE OF GOD

Gen 1:1-2:4; Mt 28:16-20

In the early church, one of the most powerful images used for the Trinity was the image of a dance – the idea that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in an eternal, vibrant, dance of rhythm and harmony, giving and receiving, a dance of grace, beauty and love. In that dance the Trinity are always in step; they are always focusing on one another. And they want to share that dance with us – to teach us the steps, to help us hear the music.

The Father reaches out in Love, inviting us to dance, to show us those moves called grace, wonder, laughter, peace. The Son connects with us in Love, taking us by the hand to draw us into the dance, whether we are hurting, or angry, or grieving, or broken, or lost. And the Spirit welcomes us, enfolding us in Love, as we are taught to dance with abandon, with kindness, with hope, with gentleness. And as we dance, we discover that the Trinity is not so much a doctrine as it is a relationship – a relationship within the Trinity and a relationship with us!

In this idea of the Dance of God, all of creation can be seen as an extension of this Dance. Atoms, light, motion – suns, planets galaxies -winter, spring, summer, autumn – plants, animals, humans – art, science, government, agriculture – every facet of creation has a role in the dance. We heard the account in Genesis of God's creation of the world and the universe. The Spirit of God hovers over the formless void and creates, as it were, a stage for the dance. God creates the light which then illuminates the stage. The dance begins – trees and plants sway in rhythmic harmony, fish swim and birds soar with the rise and fall of the music; animals prance and dance. There's a drum roll as the high point arrives with the creation of humans. They have been made to join with the creating Trinity in the dance, and to work with the Triune God in keeping the rest of creation in step.

But hardly has the dance begun, than things go awry. Adam and Eve fall out of step; they want to dance to their own tune. And that becomes the pattern of all who follow. We humans have destroyed that dance. We have ignored the rhythm, we have stood on the toes of other dancers, or maybe we have rejected entirely the invitation to be part of the great Dance of God.

But God doesn't give up. He seeks to get the dance going again through people like Noah and Abraham, and the Israelite nation. He gives instructions for the steps of the dance through Moses and the Law. He seeks to guide the people through prophets and priests, through leaders and teachers. But humans by and large refuse to get in step – they want to dance to the rhythm of their own tune. The dancing Trinity decide to send one of their number to show the world first-hand the way it is done. So, Jesus comes to earth. In the words of the song:

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,
And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth:
At Bethlehem I had my birth.

I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee,
But they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me;
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John;
They came with me and the dance went on.

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame:
The holy people said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped and they hung me on high,
And they left me there on a cross to die.

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;
It's hard to dance with the devil on your back.

They buried my body and they thought I'd gone;
But I am the dance, and I still go on:

They cut me down and I leapt up high;
I am the life that'll never, never die.
I'll live in you if you'll live in me:
I am the Lord of the dance, said he.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.*

Jesus came to earth to teach the steps, to show the way. He calls together a small group to teach them to follow the steps of His dance. They begin to learn some of the steps, but they also get it wrong rather often. Jesus says, 'You need to change.' The dance must come from your heart and your hearts aren't right. I want to help you to get your hearts right even if it's the last thing I do. And indeed, it is the last thing Jesus does in His life on earth. He follows obediently the steps of the dance, even though they take him to the cross and even though he finally dances the dance of death. But that very dance of death opens the way for the dance of life for us.

Before He dies, Jesus says to His disciples, 'My work here is done. But don't be worried and upset, I will send My Spirit. He will not just show you the steps as I have done, He will come to live right within you, to direct your steps. He will convict you when you begin to stray from God's dance, and He will nudge you back into line. When the Holy Spirit comes, you will be my witnesses - my models of the dance'. So, the dancing Trinity send another of their number to come and live right inside the dance students of Jesus. He comes to write the steps of the dance on our very hearts. He enables us to join with Him, and with the Father and the Son in God's dance – the Father who created us and revealed to us this dance; Jesus who came as a human being to show us first hand the steps to follow, and the Spirit who came to direct us from within to do this dance.

I am reminded of an explanation that someone has given for the word 'guidance'. It suggests that the letter G is for God, followed by 'I' and 'U' and 'dance'. So 'guidance' can be taken to mean, 'God, you and I dance.' God can lead us and show us the steps to take - as long as we allow Him to lead the dance and we follow His lead.

There is one last thing so say about the Dance of God - that we should be inviting others into this divine dance. God has drawn us into the dance so we can draw in others. Jesus has said in effect, 'Go and make dancing disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all the steps that I have taught you, and remember I am with you always as you do that, to the end of time'. There may be people who say in effect, 'I don't know the steps, I could never manage.' To them we say, 'You don't have to know all the steps. Just join in

and learn the steps along with the rest of us.’ There are others who may think, ‘I am unworthy to join this dance – I feel like Cinderella in her grimy clothes. To such we say, ‘You will be given new clothes for the ball – no one should feel unworthy or excluded.’ Just think about those whom Jesus met and invited into the Dance – smelly fishermen, prostitutes, leprosy sufferers, Zaccheus in his tree. No one is excluded. So to those who, like the ‘wallflowers’ at dances of old, felt unattractive and unloved, to them we say, ‘You are invited; you are loved by the God of the dance. He does not want any to be left out. He holds out a nail-pierced hand to invite you onto the dance floor.

Jesus says to each one, to you and me, ‘Can I have this dance?’

“I am the Lord of the dance” says He, “and I’ll lead you all whoever you may be, and I’ll lead you all in the dance”, says He. Let’s sing that song together. Maybe you’d even like to stand and move around a bit we sing.