

Call to worship: Psalm 149.1-4

Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of his faithful people. Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp. For the Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory.

Welcome to church today, whether in the company of others or alone at home; in this time of worship we unite with each other and all God's people across the world. We praise one God, with one voice, and dance the dance of God's people in celebration of life.

Hymn StF 477: Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FE0TEbKniU>

(Alternative from Hymns and Psalms: 681 Light of the world, thy beams I bless)

*Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart,
Teach me to move in the power of your
Spirit,
Teach me to walk in the light of your
presence,
Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.
Teach me to love with your heart of
compassion,
Teach me to trust in the word of your
promise,
Teach me to hope in the day of your coming,
Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.*

2 Let all my movements express
A heart that loves to say 'yes',
A will that leaps to obey you.
Let all my energy blaze
To see the joy in your face,
Let my whole being praise you,
Praise you.

*Teach me to dance to the beat of
your heart...*

*Grahan Kendrick (b. 1950)
and Steve Thompson*

1 You wrote the rhythm of life,
Created heaven and earth;
In You is joy without measure.
So, like a child in your sight,
I dance to see your delight,
For I was made for your pleasure,
pleasure.

*Teach me to dance to the beat of
your heart...*

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Lord of the dance, we join you today in the dance of life lived with you. Enliven our spirits with the rhythms of your creation, and may the beat of your heart fill our lives and souls. Ever-present God, open our ears to hear your tune and our hearts in longing to be a part of its great harmony. For your dance, gracious God, brought Jesus to this world to show us the steps of eternal life; not all glorious to see and not all easy to learn or to follow. But in seeking to dance those same steps we are caught up into the wonder of that life, freely given, so that our lives may follow and know the joy of participation, and the peace of completion. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory; for ever and ever. Amen

Introduction: Someone dancing with you

I picked up a book of daily meditations by the writer, Richard Rohr. He talks about us maturing in the depth of our relationship with God, such that “God becomes more a verb than a noun, more a process than a conclusion, more an experience than a dogma, more a personal relationship than an idea. There is Someone dancing with you and you no longer need to prove to anyone that you are right, nor are you afraid of making mistakes. Another word for that is *faith*.” (Richard Rohr, *Yes, and...: Daily Meditations*, adapted from *The Naked Now: Learning to See and the Mystics See*).

We need to return to the concept of maturing in our relationship with God, and to do so with the picture of a dance with God in our minds seems a good way in.

Hymn StF 476; HP 746: One more step along the world I go

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7w2WhUJHalo>

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| <p>1 One more step along the world I go, One more step along the world I go; From the old things to the new, Keep me travelling along with you: <i>And it's from the old I travel to the new;</i> <i>Keep me travelling along with you.</i></p> <p>2 Round the corners of the world I turn, More and more about the world I learn; All the new things that I see You'll be looking at along with me. <i>And it's from the old...</i></p> <p>3 As I travel through the bad and good, Keep me travelling the way I should. Where I see no way to go, You'll be telling me the way, I know. <i>And it's from the old...</i></p> | <p>4 Give me courage when the world is rough, Keep me loving though the world is tough; Leap and sing in all I do, Keep me travelling along with you: <i>And it's from the old...</i></p> <p>5 You are older than the world can be, You are younger than the life in me; Ever old and ever new, Keep me travelling along with you: <i>And it's from the old...</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Sydney Carter (1915-2004)</i></p> |
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Reading: Ephesians 2.1-10

You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved — ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — ⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Reading: Luke 11.37-41

³⁷While he was speaking, a Pharisee invited him to dine with him; so he went in and took his place at the table. ³⁸The Pharisee was amazed to see that he did not first wash before dinner. ³⁹Then the Lord said to him, ‘Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of

the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰You fools! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹So give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you.

Hymn StF 747; HP 815: Give me the wings of faith to rise

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b98AB9i9U90>

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| 1 Give me the wings of faith to rise within the veil, and see the saints above, how great their joys, how bright their glories be. | 4 They marked the footsteps that he trod, (his zeal inspired their breast) and, following their incarnate God, possess the promised rest. |
| 2 Once they were mourners here below, And poured out sighs and tears; they wrestled hard, as we do now, with sins and doubts and fears. | 5 Our glorious Leader claims our praise for his own pattern given; while the long cloud of witnesses show the same path to heaven. |
| 3 We ask them whence their victory came; they, with united breath, ascribe their conquest to the Lamb, their triumph to his death. | <i>Isaac Watts (1674-1748)</i> |

Address 2 – Works of Art

“Our glorious Leader claims our praise for his own pattern given...” (Isaac Watts; Singing the Faith 747). Or, as Paul writes to the Ephesians in ch. 2, v. 10, “For we are what he has made us...”. So it’s all God’s fault, after all! Actually, I’m drawn to the rendering of this verse in the New Jerusalem Bible, “We are God’s works of art...”. Less God’s fault, more God’s masterpiece. But I sometimes wonder if God drew some of my lines in the wrong place!

The best parties I have been to were not those where I was the one sitting at the side watching everyone else having a good time dancing the night away, while I was too self-conscious to get involved, join the fun and get to know the stranger. Growing up with God is all about participating in God’s life, not watching from the side-lines. And the more involved we become, the more aware we are that there is “Someone dancing with you”, and our mistakes matter less.

Last week’s *Desert Island Discs* on Radio 4 featured Kate Ewart-Biggs, a remarkable woman from a remarkable family. She is the Deputy Chief Executive of the British Council, and both of her parents similarly achieved greatness in being themselves, works of art that inspired others in ways of peace and hopefulness. One of the pieces of music that she selected to be cast away with on her desert island was the Lambada, a Brazilian dance tune, and with it she recounted some of her time in Brazil as a student, working amongst dispossessed young people. It was a formative period of her life, and she clearly embraced it to the full. Despite, as she says, having no rhythm whatever, she used to stumble her way through the dance and, just when she thought she was getting the feel of it, it changed rhythm and she was left high and dry again, leaving her fellows laughing at this out of step English girl. But not for Kate Ewart-Biggs sitting on the fringes and not getting involved.

There is Someone dancing with you, says Richard Rohr. It is typical of our experience of life, isn’t it, that just as we think that we’ve learned the steps, God changes the rhythm and we’re all of a muddle again. It’s up to us to decide once, and then again and again, to come to the party, to be involved in that dance, and not to sit on the side-lines and leave God without a partner in that work of art which is you and your life’s pattern. For works of art are unique, as and such, priceless and irreplaceable. God’s dance is incomplete without you. No matter how poor a dancer you think you are, participation is what you are made for.

For we are what he has made us [or, God’s works of art], created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life (Eph 2.10). In our reading, Paul

has compared our lives as they are now, complete with Christ, with them before we knew Jesus. “You were dead...”, he writes, “...but God made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved”. You *were* dead because in following your inner desires and the course of this world you were missing out on the life God prepared you for as an artist creates a masterpiece. You *are* alive because in the resurrection of Christ you can share in that life despite those drives and instincts which otherwise leave us watching the party from the wings. And in being so we are free to become the work of art God had in mind before you were even a twinkle in your Grandad’s eye. Whether that’s an Old Master, a romantic landscape, a delicate sculpture or an obscure poem I’ll leave to you; but know that God has fashioned your character, mind, heart and body to perfection. Your beauty and worth are not of your own doing. God is the artist of that which you cherish, and perhaps more importantly, of that which others cherish in you. These are God’s good gifts to you and through you to the world; this is your life in Christ.

Jesus encounters the dead in our gospel reading from Luke. He dines with a Pharisee who fails to hide his shock that Jesus does not engage in the ceremonial hand-washing required before eating. This is not about physical cleanness and infection control, but about ritual cleanliness in case there had been inadvertent contact with somebody who was “unclean”. The Pharisees cherished their punctiliousness, their detailed observance of the letter of the traditions of the Law. Jesus sees in them so much dead wood, which was blocking their way to life as God intends it to be.

As a quantity surveyor, attention to detail has always been critically important to me. Tears of frustration are shed as junior members of staff fail to appreciate how much it matters that the maths is correct, the reports are in the same font throughout, and the correct contract clause is quoted. But at the same time, as they mature into their profession, they must learn to see the bigger picture, to understand that it is not detail for detail’s sake, but the financial protection their clients’ investment that matters. Getting the details right is necessary to achieving that end. Jesus didn’t have it in for the God’s Law, but he had certainly had enough of those who were satisfied with looking as though they followed the Law to it’s last detail, but failed to see that it’s purpose is God’s reign of justice and love in the world. “You fools!”, he cries, “Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? Give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you”. The “outside” attention to the intricate details of hand washing had replaced the “inside” bigger picture of having a heart for God.

Richard Rohr speaks of our picture of God being, at the start, a bit of a mixture of the authority figures in our lives: Mum and Dad and perhaps one or two others. It’s a cosy image, and comforting when we are troubled, even if a bit strict when we are naughty. It’s an inadequate view of God that is clearly not the stuff of a dance partner in the unique dance of your life. Holding this view of God, we will be more concerned about keeping rules, hanging on to what is ours, and being and feeling secure. That’s not the dance partner God seeks.

We need to mature to become those works of art that God has in mind. We need to see the bigger picture of God’s desire for a just and peaceful world, and know that without our part being played to the full, God’s plan is incomplete. We will trip over the finer steps of the dance from time to time; some of the more intricate steps may take some mastering; and on occasions even the music may seem too faint to hear. But that Someone is always dancing alongside; “you no longer need to prove to anyone that you are right, nor are you afraid of making mistakes. Another word for that is *faith*.” Amen.

Poem: *I Praise The Dance* by St Augustine

I praise the dance,
for it frees people from the heaviness of matter
and binds the isolated to community.

I praise the dance, which demands everything:
health and a clear spirit and a buoyant soul.

Dance is a transformation of space, of time, of people,
who are in constant danger of becoming all brain,
will, or feeling.

Dancing demands a whole person,
one who is firmly anchored in the centre of his life,
who is not obsessed by lust for people and things
and the demon of isolation in his own ego

Dancing demands a freed person,
one who vibrates with the equipoise of all his powers.

I praise the dance.

O man, learn to dance,
or else the angels in heaven will not know
what to do with you.

Hymn StF 364; HP 744: O for a thousand tongues to sing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-dEfvz6Vms>

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| 1 Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise, the glories of my God and King, the triumphs of his grace! | 5 He speaks; and listening to His voice, New life the dead receive, The mournful, broken hearts rejoice, The humble poor believe. |
| 2 My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim, to spread through all the earth abroad, the honours of thy name. | 6 Hear Him, ye dead; His praise, ye dumb, Your loosened tongues employ; Ye blind, behold your Saviour come; And leap, ye lame, for joy! |
| 3 Jesus – the name that charms our fears that bids our sorrows cease; 'tis music in the sinner's ears, 'tis life, and health, and peace. | 7 See all your sins on Jesus laid: the Lamb of God was slain; His soul was once an offering made For every soul of man. |
| 4 He breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free; His blood can make the foulest clean, his blood availed for me. | 8 In Christ, our Head, you then shall know, Shall fee, your sins forgiven, Anticipate your heaven below, And own that love is heaven. |

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

Prayers of Intercession

Sisters and brothers in Christ, God invites us to bring our doubts and fears, our joys and concerns, our petitions and praise, and offer them for the earth and all its creatures.

We pray for peace in Europe, particularly remembering the people of Ukraine and Russia...

We pray for climate justice throughout the world, asking that our leaders may unite in efforts to turn around climate change and share the resources that you give to us all...

We pray for those who are in hospital, in care, or in a place which is strange to them...

We pray for those in whose family, marriage, or close relationship, there is stress or a break-up...

We pray for those who are waiting for a birth, or a death, or news which will affect their lives...

We pray for those who need to forget the God they do not believe in and meet the God who believes in them...

Receive these prayers, O God, and transform us through them, that we may have eyes to see and hearts to understand not only what you do on our behalf, but what you call us to do so that your realm will come to fruition in glory. Amen.

Hymn StF 81; HP 566: Now thank we all our God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s99dNPKYtHk>

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| 1 Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices, who wondrous things has done, in whom his world rejoices; who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today. | 3 All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given, the Son, and him who reigns with them in highest heaven, the one eternal God, whom heaven and earth adore, for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore. |
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- 2 O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us;
to keep us in his grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
in this world in the next.

Martin Rinkart (1586-1649)
Based on Ecclesiasticus 50.22-24
Tr. *Catherine Winkworth (1827-78)*

Blessing

Trusting in what is unseen,
believing the best is to come,
in hope the universe waits:
God's purpose shall be revealed.

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May you know the enduring friendship of the Christ who died for you, the close companionship of the Spirit who dwells with you, and the eternal love of God who holds you close, today and every day. Amen.