

May 10, 2020

Song of Songs 2:8-10

The Dance of Redemption

Jonathan M. Romig
CornerstoneWestford.com

The ballet *Giselle* is a love story between a young frail maiden and a nobleman. Giselle lives in a small village with her mother where the villagers are preparing to celebrate the Wine Festival. The local huntsman Hilarion secretly loves her but so does another, Count Albrecht.¹ The Count disguises himself as a peasant and shows her affection and care to win her love. The huntsman Hilarion will have none of it. He interrupts their dance and his suspicion grows that this peasant is more than he seems.

When the villagers return from harvesting grapes, they all begin to dance, but *Giselle's* mother warns her of her frailty. If she dies of a broken heart, in death she will be transformed into a wilis, a restless and vengeful spirit that haunts men caught in the forest late at night.

When a prince and his daughter join the party, Count Albrecht slips away so as not to be discovered. When the princess discovers both she and Giselle are engaged, she gifts Giselle with a beautiful necklace. The celebration is soon ruined when Hilarion, having discovered Albrecht's secret, exposes him for an imposter. He is not a peasant but a Count, and it turns out, is engaged to the prince's daughter.

Giselle is crushed. She loved the man she thought was a peasant but turns out to be a deceitful nobleman. Her mind escapes her and she dies, her heart in pieces.² Act I of the ballet *Giselle* ends in brokenness, despair, and death. The dance has come to an end and it has not ended in joy.

The Bible's story also begins as a love story, one not so different from *Giselle*. It too starts with a dance, a cosmic dance as the Spirit of God soars over the waters (Gen. 1:1). God beckons the world and beauty into being. He places the very best of humankind, Adam and Eve, in a garden to keep it. God was the lover and we the beloved, but we broke the dance. We danced with the devil instead of our Creator. Like a leaping dancer who tears a tendon, we fell.

The question then, is what will happen in Act II? Will we, like Giselle and Albrecht, dance again? Does God invite us to the dance anew? Though we fell, our God never stopped dancing. He invites us to come and dance *the dance of redemption* with him.

Our redeemer invites us to come and dance.

Our Creator invites us, yes beckons us, to come and enter into relationship with him. Our relationship with God is like a dance. Will we let him lead us or will we dance to our own tune? The Song of Songs is a poetic dance, a love song between a bride and groom, a husband and wife. Together they discover the rhythm and beauty of love and marriage. The groom comes for his bride leaping like a dance.

Song of Songs 2:8-9a, 10 (ESV)

The voice of my beloved!

Behold, he comes,
leaping over the mountains,
bounding over the hills.

My beloved is like a gazelle
or a young stag...

My beloved speaks and says to me:
“Arise, my love, my beautiful one,
and come away,

In the Old Testament God describes his relationship with Israel as one of marriage. Though Israel resists and dances with other partners, her husband extends his hand again and again (Jer. 31:32-33). In the New Testament we find human marriage is but a dance rehearsal of a much greater performance, Christ’s love for the gathering of believers he calls church and bride (Eph. 5:25). We also resist. My heart grows cold. Despite having the best dance partner in the universe we still want to lead at cost to our own beauty.

Classical ballet is a distinct yet precise, light yet graceful, form of dance.³ They call ballet, “poetry in motion.” A ballerina can perform great feats alone. She is elegant and beautiful. But a man and a woman can perform even greater feats together. The marriage author Gary Thomas writes of ballet dancing in his book *Cherish*:⁴

Famed Russian-born ballet choreographer George Balanchine once said, “Ballet is woman.” The best male dancers recognize that their role is all about showcasing the female dancer’s beauty, particularly during pas de deux—couples’ dancing. People generally go to the ballet to see the beautiful form, grace, balance, coordination, and strength of the female lead, but all of those qualities are even better showcased when the ballerina has a male dancer who can set her up, catch her, and support her.

As a former male dancer and later choreographer, Balanchine said his job was to “make the beautiful more beautiful.”⁵

Couples’ dance is like our relationship with God. Apart from him we can create beauty, but when we accept his invitation to dance, our lives become an eternal work of art. *Our redeemer invites us to come and dance*. Will you accept the invitation? Will you take his hand? He wants to redeem you. That means he wants to set your relationship with God right. *Will you let him dance the dance of redemption with you?*

Maybe you’re not ready. You’re asking, “What type of dance is this? Will this dance be happy or sad, easy or hard? Are we dancing the tango, swing, hip-hop, blues, or ballet?” We’re all asking the same questions, “What is relationship with God like? How will the story go?” If we look at the greater-dance, the story of redemption throughout the Bible, we find God’s relationship with us is three things. *The dance of redemption is tragic yet joyful, humbles yet exalts, and wounds yet redeems*.

I. The dance of redemption is tragic yet joyful.

Our relationship with God is bitter yet sweet. In the Old Testament the women would dance for the men as they came home from victory in battle (Judg. 11:31, 34; Song 6:13; Jer. 31:4). I imagine that even as they danced some were weeping. The dance God dances with us often starts with sorrow before turning to joy. Ecclesiastes tells us there is a time for sadness and a time for happiness and dance.

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4 (ESV)

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

Dance in the Old Testament is often the cure for sadness. The psalmist David, the best King of Israel, wrote a song of celebration for the dedication of the temple, a bitter-sweet event he never saw in his lifetime. David envisioned it to be an incredibly joyful event full of dancing even though he would not be there.

Psalm 30:11 (ESV)

You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;
you have loosed my sackcloth
and clothed me with gladness,

Dance is a way to express joy. Dancing is both a result of joy and can produce joy. It's a way we can thank God for turning our sorrow into something valuable. When we dance this way, we're echoing that greater dance of our Creator come to rescue us, *the dance of redemption*.

When God led Israel out of captivity in Egypt the people celebrated the first Passover, a meal meant to remind them of their deliverance from bondage. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* says "the Hebrew verb *pāsaḥ*... 'to perform a limping dance,' is the root of 'Pesach' or Passover."⁶ When Israel left captivity in Egypt, there must have been dancing, but dancing with a limp. Joy is born out of hurt. We limp when God takes those we love but our hearts dance because we know they are with him. We limp when hard things happen and God offers no answer but we dance because God is still good. We limp today but we will dance tomorrow because Jesus loves us forever. "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing."

After Passover, God rescued his people from the hand of Pharaoh at the crossing of the Red Sea. When Pharaoh's armies were about to destroy them, God brought the waves crashing down upon them. As the people stood on the far shore, Moses' sister Miriam broke into a dance of praise (Psa. 150:4).

Exodus 15:20-21 (ESV)

Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang to them:

"Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea."

We praise God when our dance with him is easy and when it is hard, when life makes sense and when it stings. Ballets like *Swan Lake* and *Romeo and Juliet* express emotions both happy and sad in ways our words fail. It is no wonder that so many Bible stories are told in ballets: Jean Börlin's *La Creation du Monde*,⁷ George Balanchine's *Noah and the Flood* and *The Prodigal Son*, Vaslav Nijinsky's *The Legend of Joseph*, Ninette de Valois's *Job*, Martha Graham's *Hérodiade*, and Kenneth MacMillan's *The Judas Tree*. All the Bible's stories with their great leaps and deep falls are telling a greater story, *one of redemption*. *Our redeemer invites us to come and dance the dance of redemption, which is tragic yet joyful*.

II. The dance of redemption humbles yet exalts.

God dips us low before lifting us up. He has done it time and time again to those who love him. When David was king over Israel he decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The ark was a golden chest where God's presence resided. As David was leading the processional into the city of Jerusalem he danced with everything he had.

2 Samuel 6:14a (ESV) And David danced before the Lord with all his might...

The picture must have been a wild scene because not everyone was impressed, including his wife.

2 Samuel 6:16 (ESV) As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart.

When Michal confronts David about the impropriety of his dancing, he declares:

2 Samuel 6:21b-22a (ESV) ...I will celebrate before the Lord. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes.”

There is something deeply humbling about dance. There is a loss of dignity for the sake of beauty. The professional ballerina Corina Gill says, “Vulnerability and suffering goes into art.”⁸ It is that vulnerability and suffering that creates beauty. David puts all he has into his offering of worship before the Lord. He makes much of God by making little of himself. We too enter into the dance of redemption by humbling ourselves, worshipping him at cost to our own pride. We lay our whole life before him and when he so desires, he will lift us up. He will lift us up higher than we can ever imagine.

Ezekiel 28 tells us the garden of Eden was on a mountaintop (Gen. 2:10; Ezek. 28:13-14).⁹ Isaiah 2 tells us one day God is going to once again establish his eternal city on a mountaintop where heaven and earth meet (Isa. 2:1-4; Rev. 21:1-4). All throughout Scripture we find brief glimpses of what that eternal mountaintop relationship will be like. In the **Song of Songs 2:8** the beloved “comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills.” (c.f., Song 8:14) In the face of intense hardships and despair, the prophet Habakkuk says of his relationship with God:

Habakkuk 3:19 (ESV)

God, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the deer's;
he makes me tread on my high places.

If you are in a valley with your walk with God, God seems distant and far, he will not always leave you there. If you are on a mountaintop with your walk with God, enjoy the view, maybe dance a little because God has put you there, at least for a season. One day God will lift all who trust him up to the highest peaks to dance like a deer on the high places forever and ever. *Our redeemer invites us to come and dance. The dance of redemption is tragic yet joyful, humbles yet exalts, and...*

III. The dance of redemption wounds yet redeems.

If we try to dance through this life without God, we will find we always fall short of his glory (Rom 3:23). We try to be good and kind, and much of the time we are, but we can find that like someone with two left feet we trip over ourselves and those we love. We sin and it hurts us badly. We need a someone to lead us.

The ballerina Corina Gill says she has seen a tiny dancer fill the stage just standing there. We too have a master dancer, God himself, who has stepped out onto the stage and into the spotlight. Our redeemer has come in the silhouette of God's one and only Son, the greatest glory in a frail human body.

As the spotlight shines on the Son it finds him spotless in every way. His pose is regal, his head held high. He truly fills the stage. All eyes are on him as he dances. He leaps and soars, strong and sure. His life is sinless, perfect. Another figure enters the stage. This one is all dressed in black, one seen in the world's brokenness yet unseen in the world's eyes. The devil rages and roars. Jesus dances on, never missing a beat, always holy, always good.

His dance takes him to the cross where he puts all his vulnerability and suffering into his art. He sacrifices himself unto death so that we might join him in life. By his wounds we are healed (Isa. 53:5).

John 3:16 (ESV) “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

He redeems our darkness, our scars, our sins, so that we might step into the spotlight spotless. The devil has nothing on us now. The curtain of death closes on the principal dancer but for a moment, three days. When

the tomb opens again he is somehow even more glorious than before. He shines with the brightest love, the strongest strength, the oldest power.

Will you recognize him for who he is? So many have missed him (Matt. 11:17). Will you dance? Will you accept Christ's hand? If your heart is wounded with your sin, come and dance with Jesus. Come and enter into relationship with him. He is our principal dancer, our hero, our king. He can forgive you and remake you.¹⁰ *The dance of redemption is tragic yet joyful, humbles yet exalts, wounds yet redeems.*

Our redeemer invites us to come and dance. Will you take his hand?

In Act II of the ballet, Giselle is dead. The huntsman Hilarion comes to her tombstone late at night, grief-stricken and guilty. Out of the woods the wilis come, the spirits of wronged maidens who died with unfulfilled love beating in their hearts. For his sins the queen of the wilis sentences Hilarion to dance until he dies. Exhausted, he perishes.

Next comes Count Albrecht to Giselle's tombstone, dismayed and sorrowful. His love led to her death. Out of the grave Giselle's spirit rises as a wilis, but so too the queen of the wilis comes with her vengeful spirits. The queen captures Albrecht. Although Giselle begs for mercy, stretching wide her arms to protect him, the queen condemns him to dance until he dies; but Albrecht does not dance alone.

Giselle dances with him. Giselle, the frail of heart, rescues Albrecht by dancing with him through the night. When he collapses and cannot dance any longer, when death is near, she raises him up, higher together than he ever could have danced alone. Together they dance until the morning rises, breaking the queen's curse. Giselle descends back into her grave and Albrecht, for a moment lays his hands on her tombstone, the shape of the cross. Giselle is the Christ figure. *Our redeemer invites us to come and dance. Will you take his hand?*

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."
Numbers 6:24-26 (ESV)

Quote taken from *Cherish: The One Word That Change Everything for Your Marriage* by Gary Thomas
Copyright ©2017 by Gary Thomas. Used by permission of Zondervan. www.zondervan.com

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message on Facebook Live during the 2020 COVID-19 (Coronavirus) lockdown in Massachusetts. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

You and your family or friends can use these group discussion questions to talk through today's sermon and Bible passage. Please use whatever questions you find helpful.

1. What was the last ballet you saw, if any? What do you think of it?
2. How do you feel about dance and why do you feel that way? Do you love it, hate it, or are somewhere in-between?
3. What is your favorite style of dance? Contemporary? Ballet? Hip-hop? Ballroom? Swing? Blues? Salsa? Some other kind? Why do you like that type of dance most?

4. How does the allegory of dance teach us about our relationship with God? How does dance help us understand our relationship with God's one and only Son, Christ Jesus?
5. Why is dance such a joyful event? How can dance be a way to worship God? Does dance have to be overtly religious, such as liturgical dance, for it to be an act of praise?
6. Why can dancing feel so embarrassing? Why is it hard for some people to dance and not for others? What can this teach us about the way we worship?
7. What does dancing on the mountaintops have to teach us about our relationship with God? What is significant about this place in the Bible? Keep in mind the Bible speaks of Eden being on a mountaintop (Ezek. 28:13-14) but also warns of "the high places" (2 Kgs. 18:3-4).
8. Do you believe Jesus is the principal dancer of all of creation and the hero of your life's story? Why or why not? Are you willing to accept the redeemer's invitation to come and dance?
9. Do you want to go to the ballet or watch one at home? Might I suggest *Giselle*?

End your discussion by praying for what you learned and that the Holy Spirit would help you apply it to your life. Pray that Jesus would use it to further his rescue in our world.

¹ Count Albrecht is pronounced “all-bricked.”

² Synopsis created from two sources:

Giselle. American Ballet Theatre. Premiered May 21, 1998. Accessed April 15, 2020. <https://www.abt.org/ballet/giselle/>

Giselle. Russian National ballet S. Radchenko. 2015. Accessed April 15, 2020. <http://radchenko-ballet.com/en/giselle/>

³ Definition adapted from the Oxford Dictionary via Lexico. Accessed April 16, 2020. <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/ballet>

⁴ Balanchine is pronounced “Balan-sheen.”

⁵ Taken from *Cherish: The One Word That Change Everything for Your Marriage* by Gary Thomas Copyright ©2017 by Gary Thomas. Used by permission of Zondervan. www.zondervan.com

Quoted from *Marriage as Ballet*, accessed April 16, 2020. <https://www.preaching.com/book-reviews/marriage-as-ballet/>

⁶ David Noel Freedman, Ed. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. 2000. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 311. I removed reference to “(piel).”

⁷ Pronounced “mond.”

⁸ Ockenga Fellows Retreat: Arts & Media. Guest speaker Corina Gill. March 12, 2020. Corina is featured in *Spotlight: A Day in the Life of Boston Ballet’s Corina Gill* by the Boston Ballet. Published October 8, 2015. Accessed April 16, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xE2rn_INMTA

⁹ *Intro to Spiritual Beings*. The Bible Project. Published February 14, 2019. Accessed April 16, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBxOZqtGTXE>

¹⁰ Maybe you’ve heard the story of the prodigal son and can identify with him. You’re the bad one who danced to your own tune. You know God could never love you. Jesus tells us that when the prodigal son came home “...his father saw him and felt compassion, and *ran* and embraced him and kissed him.” (Luke 15:20b ESV; emphasis added). Running was not something old men did. This old man’s running embrace is like God’s love for you. He identifies himself as our Heavenly Father. When we come home, he comes running and leaping to scoop us up in his arms and kiss us. “My child, you are covered in filth but you are mine!” He washes us clean and invites us to come and dance the bridal dance with his Son.

Mounce’s Expository Dictionary (MED), s.v. “RUN,” 607. https://accordance.bible/link/read/Mounce_Expository#9556