

Who shall dance with God?
Hebrews 11:17-22

Some years ago, Wilsie Martin, a noted preacher, was appointed as the pastor of a large metropolitan church in Los Angeles. He was honored to receive that prestigious appointment. On his first Sunday to preach, he arrived early. As he stood looking out his study window, he noticed an elderly woman with a walking cane trying to climb the steep front steps to the sanctuary doors. Wilsie Martin rushed out to help her. "Pardon me, ma'am, but could I assist you up these steps this morning?"

"Oh that would be so kind of you" she answered. Slowly, tediously, the two climbed together, moving up the steps with great effort to the great doors of the sanctuary entrance. When they finally reached the top, the woman turned to Wilsie and said, "By the way, can you tell me who is preaching at my church this morning?" "I surely can," came the reply. Proudly, he said "Wilsie Martin is preaching at your church today."

"Oh," said the woman. "Then could you please help me back down the stairs!" This is that Wilsie Martin shared of his story.

I'm standing in front of you again today. Are you disappointed with me? I'm going to talk about faith. Everybody has problems. Everyone struggles with problems each day. But if we have faith that God has a purpose behind our problems, our life will not be a constant struggle with problems, but rather a dance with God.

The life of believing in God is dancing with God. What a fascinating idea, that the Christian life is a dance with God! Two theologians used this idea of dancing, of God as dancer. Sam Keen titled his book: "To a dancing God." And noted Catholic theologian Henri Nouwen titled his book: "Turn my mourning into dancing."

Believe it or not, I'm a dancer. I have been a liturgical dancer at the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference Worship service team for several years. So I'm a dancer. You must also be a dancer, if you would have commitment to God.

In Hebrew 11, as we read this morning, talks about faith. The entire chapter of Hebrew 11 is about faith. Hebrew 11:1 says; "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Do you fully understand what that means? The definition of faith is very hard to understand. Faith is a process of experiencing God. It is not a thought, a concept, or confidence.

I met my wife Sun thirty eight years ago. After dating for three years and we knew each other fairly well, and trusted each other. I asked her, "Are you OK with my going into ministry?" She answered me, "I will follow you wherever you go." Although she didn't know me fully, she trusted me. By trusting me, she was able to get to me know me better. Faith is trusting through knowing and knowing through trusting. Faith is not noun but a verb. Faith is an interaction like a dance.

Imagine a dance. A dance is two persons interacting -- one leads and the other follows, moving step by step according to the rhythm of the music. Dancing is an act of joy, and an enjoyment of mutual knowing and trusting.

The scripture reading today describes the testing of Abraham's faith. The supreme example of Abraham's faith in God was his willingness to offer up his son Isaac. There is no trace of agony or struggling in the faith of Abraham. He just obeyed, trusting that God would fulfill his promise, even if he had to raise men from the dead. There is willingness in Abraham's faith to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice."

Let's take a look at Isaac's attitude. Josephus, a noted Jewish historian, gives Isaac's age at 25 when he ascended Mt. Moriah. He describes him as throwing himself joyfully toward the altar, even though he escaped the fate awaiting him. Isaac conducted himself as the worthy son of Abraham. In the

Jewish tradition they believed that Isaac might say; "My father, bind me well so that I do not kick you in a way that father's offering might be invalid."

Faith is inherited. Like father like son, Abraham and Isaac have the same attitude to God who commands Abraham to offer up his son as a sacrifice. The name Isaac means "he laughs", which refers to his joy (and that he had to turn to sacrifice in favor of a higher joy.) By faith, Isaac blessed his sons Jacob and Esau for their future. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped God. Reflecting on Isaac's incident, we may say, "In the midst of life we die." But God answers, "Nay, in the midst of death we live." This is the confidence we have through faith.

How shall we dance with God? One day, Peter and John were going to the temple at the time of prayer (which was three in the afternoon). Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him and said, "Look at us!" So the man gave Peter and John his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

"What was happening?" He was dancing, dancing with God. Psalm 30:11 says, "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing." That is the good news that we would dance with.

A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection from Picasso to Monet to Von Gogh to Raphael. They often would sit together and admire their great collection of art.

When the Vietnam War broke out, the son went to war. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified, and he grieved deeply for his only son.

About a month later, there was a knock at the door. A young man stood there with a large package in his hands. He said, "Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when he was hit. We were close friends, and he often talked to me about you. He told me about your love for art. I know this isn't much. I'm not really a great artist, but I want you to have this painting."

The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. The father was amazed at how this young soldier had captured his son's personality in the painting. He offered to pay the young artist. "No, no, sir, your son gave his life for me. This is my gift to you." The father hung the painting over his mantle, and when visitors came, he showed them the painting of his son first before showing them any of the other great works of his collection.

A few months later the man died. There was to be a great auction of his paintings. Many people gathered, excited over the possibility of purchasing one of the great works.

The auctioneer first presented the painting of the man's son. "We will start the bidding with this portrait of his son. Who will bid for this picture?" There was silence. Then a voice of protest from the back of the room: "We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one. Let's get to the good stuff - the Rembrandt's, the Raphael's, the Van Gogh's, the Monet's. Let's go on with the real bids."

But the auctioneer would not bend. "The son! The son! Who'll take the son?" Finally, a voice came from the back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. "I'll give ten dollars for the painting. I loved that boy. Wish I had more to offer."

"We have ten dollars. Who will bid twenty?" "Oh, just give it to him for ten dollars! Let's get to the masters."

"Ten dollars is the bid. Won't someone bid twenty?" Now the crowd was angry. They didn't want the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collection. The auctioneer pounded the gavel. "Going once. . . twice. . . sold, for ten dollars." A man sitting in the second row shouted, "Now, let's get on with the collection!"

The auctioneer laid down his gavel. "Sorry," he said, "the auction is over."

"What about the great paintings?" the crowd demanded.

"I'm sorry. I have my instructions. There was a secret stipulation in the will, which I was not allowed to reveal until this time. Only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought the painting would inherit the entire estate, including all the paintings. The man who took the son gets everything!"

Here is God's message: "The Son! The Son! Who'll take the Son?" Whoever takes the Son gets everything!"

Hebrew 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." How can we please God? How can we dance with God? The only way to please God and to dance with God is through and with the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. If we believe that Jesus forgives our sins we would not just stand. Rather, we would dance with Christ our Lord. If we believe the word of the Lord is truth, we should dance with the truth, and not struggle. We know that we have problems, but we believe that God has a purpose behind our problems. The problem we have is not to struggle, but to dance with God. Who shall dance with God?