I think I told you last week that history was my favorite subject in school, but when I was young, when I was in elementary school, it was gym. What's not to love? You get to play football or basketball or softball. And if it's raining or snowing outside you get to go in a play dodge ball. These are the things that the guys on my street and I would be doing even if we weren't in school. So gym was my favorite.

At least for a while. Then in fifth grade, everything changed. Because it was in fifth grade gym class that we were supposed to learn to dance. Yes, dance. Oh boy. And remember please this was Colorado, so we're not talking about ballroom dance or anything like that. This was square dancing. Virginia Reel, that kind of thing. And with square dancing you not only have to dance with a girl, sheesh! But you have to listen to the caller and do what he or she says. So if you have to do si do or make a left hand star or whatever, that's what you have to do. This was not good. I was always running into someone because I was doing the wrong thing, or even if I was doing the right thing, it was two beats late so it made it wrong. But the worst was when you'd move around the square in the opposite direction from your partner until the caller said, “Find your partner and sashay back home.” That was always an invitation to crash into some other guy who was trying to find his partner and then find his way home. And I never figured out how to sashay. But I did discover that you never dance alone. You always have a partner.

In the scriptures we read today, there is dancing, and it may not look like it at first glance, but there is always a partner in the dance. When David conquers the city of Jerusalem to make it his capital, he knows that there is something lacking. For it to be the capital for God's people, he needs to bring into it the Ark of the Covenant. God had instructed the priests back when the people were wandering in the wilderness to make a box of acacia wood and overlay it with gold. Inside they were to keep the tablets of the Ten Commandments (along with the rod of Aaron, brother of Moses, and lastly, some of the
manna they had been eating as a reminder of how God had provided for them). This box had been carried by the people into battle with their enemies with the belief that if the ark went with them, then God went with them too.

In establishing his kingship and Jerusalem as his capital, David is savvy enough to know that he needs to showcase the patron deity that gives inspiration and comfort to the newly united nation. David’s parade symbolizes the entrance of God into the city. The people line the streets; the musicians are out in force; and food is passed out for all. Then, to top it all off, King David drops all his royal robes and begins dancing before the ark as it is carried up the hill to Jerusalem; he dances and whirs and cavorts in his joy. David is young and he is king and God has blessed him and all is right with the world. He celebrates and God celebrates and all the people celebrate with them. David is filled with the Spirit and he dances and the Spirit dances with him. The Spirit is his partner.

Not so much in our second story though. Our New Testament story is an example of a different kind of dance and a different partner. We have the hero, John the Baptist and we have the villain of the story, Herodias, wife of the Jewish King, Herod. Now King Herod had the misfortune of falling in love with his niece, Herodias, who at the time happened to be married to his half-brother Philip. After divorcing Philip, she married Herod. Though perfectly Roman to have done so, this was forbidden by Jewish law and John the Baptist was not shy in reminding them of this fact. And he said so, over and over again as he preached his message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And many people listened. So Herod had John arrested and put into prison where he languishes until the great banquet celebrating Herod’s birthday. That’s when Salome dances for him and he is so entranced that he promises her anything she asks for as a reward. Of course, at her mother’s direction, she asks for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Poor Herod, trapped by his promise, trapped even more by his his lust for Salome, he gives into his wife—despite his worries—and John-the-Baptist’s head sits upon a lavish banquet table flanked by fat juicy grapes and slow-roasted pheasant.
Salome, and her mother Herodias, and King Herod himself and all involved in this dance and it is a dance with power. They are afraid that John threatens their power over the people. And so John has to go. The lust for power, the desire for security and control, these are the partners in the dance before King Herod that night. And John loses his head. And Herod never gets over it.

It may feel like this is a story that is far away from us. Herod's world is one of corruption, lust and power. Herod's court is in a far country whose horizon seems so distant from ours. But is it? How often do we do our dance with power as our partner? I have to admit that I can't help thinking about our current political sphere when I read this story. I have lamented my evangelical brothers and sisters who, even though I don't always agree with them, have made power their partner. I feel like there are folks who have decided that being in power is worth sacrificing their principles. And so whatever moral failing is happening at the apex of our nation's government, they will turn a blind eye as long as they get their judges and their tax cuts. They dance with power. And the other side is no different. They speak only about strategies to get power back so that they can undo what the other side has done. Their dance is also with power and they are tempted to do whatever they can to get it back.

This is when as Christians we should be hearing the music of the Spirit, calling us back to the dance with him. "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets." That's our partner. That's who should be our partner. That's what kind of dance we should be doing. The spirit, the giver of life. Are we dancing on the side of life? We look around at the world God has created through the Spirit, are we helping it to live or are we complicit in its death because we would rather maintain power? The Spirit who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.

Who is glorified in the dances that we do? Are we so concerned with maintaining power that we worship the nation or the party or some economic model? Is God glorified by what we do? Are we so concerned about our church, our program, our status in the community, that we are glorified rather than God? St. Paul is pretty clear about the fruit of the Spirit in the letter to the Galatians. The fruit of the
Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Is that what we see? Is that what we see growing in our common life? Paul warns us about the other side also: impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, etc. I guess that's how you tell that your partner in the dance of life is the desire for power rather than the Spirit of God. We see that all over in our society right now, you hear it on the news from the left and the right, Democrats and Republicans. And I hope that above it all we remember according to the Creed that it is the Spirit of God who spoke through the prophets: as the prophet says, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and love kindness and to walk humbly with your God. In our common life as a congregation, or as a denomination, as a community or as a nation, are we doing justice, are we acting kindly, are we walking humbly with God? And do we look at each other and see the face of Christ? Think of this in political terms. Think of the person that you least like in the news today. Trump, Putin, Pelosi, Waters, whomever. Do you pray for them? Do you see that they also are a child of God? Feel free to disagree with them, with one another, but love them still. Do the loving thing for that is how we dance with the Spirit, but be careful not to dance with power. Ask how can I be most loving, not how can I best maintain power. Your life is a dance. But you gotta have a partner. Dance with the Spirit.