



Called to Dance!

by
Betsey
Beckman

"We are called to act with justice, we are called to love tenderly, we are called to serve one another; to walk humbly with God."

—David Haas (*GIA*, 1988)



So goes the popular liturgical music set-

ting for Micah 6:8. I've been thinking a lot about what it means to be called. Because the fact is, we are all called. Do you remember the call of Jeremiah? There God reaches out to touch Jeremiah's mouth saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Like Jeremiah, we are each called to have our own unique role in the unfolding of the kingdom here on earth. We were born for this. We were loved into being for this. How we manifest our calling will differ for each of us according to our gifts, but the elements that all our callings have in common are

simply these: to act with justice, love tenderly and walk humbly with God.

I have discovered that my call is to dance. My life is flooded with gradual moments of epiphany revealing my love for dance: my childhood swaying and skipping to church bells in my yard; in my early twenties, rocking and releasing in my farewell dance to my mother at her funeral. From my teen-age self dancing playful pumpkins at our Halloween visit to the children's hospital, to my thirty-something self circling and chanting and mourning with friends the night our country first bombed Iraq. From my secret solo dances on silent beaches with the moon at midnight to the dances for thousands at conferences bringing biblical characters to life—such courageous figures as Miriam, the dancing prophet; Mary proclaiming her powerful Magnificat; and Mary of Magdala, falling into baptismal fonts and emerging washed clean to announce the mystery of resurrection.

I believe in a vision of a world where we are all called to dance. When we dance, we move and celebrate our connection between body and spirit. Of course, dance, like

any powerful energy, can be used for seduction, betrayal, or to reinforce existing hierarchical structures or patriarchal imbalances. That's how we see dance in one famous biblical passage where Salome dances for the head of John the Baptist. Because of images such as these, the role of women in dance has become suspect. In some cultures, women were not allowed to dance. In other cultures, dance is stripped of its power and seen as a primarily female territory of sweetness and superfluous adornment.

To dance is to engage in a powerful activity. To truly surrender oneself to the rhythm of the heartbeat of creation is to engage at an essential level in the



mystery that is beyond us all, holding us all, binding us all together in a pattern of intricate and complex beauty. When you dance, you let go of the need to be in control of your life. You say "yes!" to the primary sensual nature of life. You allow the Spirit to be alive in your every muscle and bone and the blood coursing through you. Some dances have set steps that you learn and then enter into, like the ancient prayers that are passed down and allow a whole community to move as one. Other dances are spontaneous and unplanned, where your head does not know what your body is going to do, and you surrender into the wisdom of an ancient connection, like the gift of speaking in tongues, a language that flows through you without you having to understand every word.

Some dances are not set to music, but are rather the deep sighs and groans of our innermost beings. Some dances put us in touch with deep emotions, like the anger we feel at being abused or denied, the utter grief we feel when those we love are ripped away from us, the terror that we have known when some part of ourselves is threatened. When we allow ourselves to feel as we move, deep places in us are stirred, memories of childhood wounds can be uncovered ... and sometimes our shadow selves awaken.

But the beauty lies here: if we can begin to trust our own bodies as true gifts of the Spirit, then we need not fear the expressions that sleep within us. We can become truly awake to the powerful

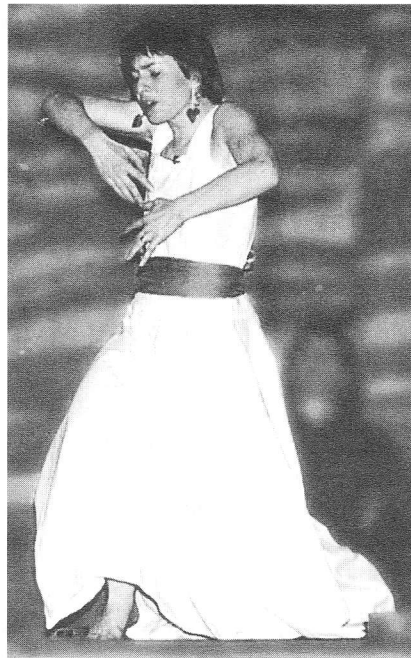
energies that stir in our bellies and in our breath. We can become familiar with the tides of our anger, and when the time is right we can ride the waves of this God-given energy so that we can help justice roll like a river! We can weep and rend our garments and fall to the earth in grief, letting all our tears run down, only to discover that a new seed is watered by our tears and begins to sprout in us. With our own heart melting within us we can reach out tenderly to those in need around us. And when we discover the child within, we can laugh and skip and shout for joy that we are living in the light of resurrection.

Not everyone

will devote their life to dance as I have been called to do. But dance can help anyone tap into the energy needed to live their own unique call. No matter how repressive an institution or culture becomes, like dandelions coming up through cracks in sidewalks, the Spirit of the dance cannot be completely smothered. Life breaks out in all sorts of wonderful ways. When a people has lost their dance, they have lost their connection to the Spirit blowing and the tongues of fire propelling them into courageous action.

So, as you listen and awaken

to your own call to act justly and love tenderly, I invite you to dance. Celebrate your body by tapping your toe, circling your hips, embracing the sky. When you are weary of the way, dance a bit. Surrender to the energy of the stars that dance around you, let them dance in you. When you are filled with wonder in the



breaking through of a log-jam in your tireless efforts to transform the planet, shout for joy, lift your arms and turn and turn and kick up your heels. The Spirit is alive! When you are outraged at the injustice that still remains, ground yourself in your holy anger, practice prowling like a cat and pouncing, striking out with clarity and

courage, shouting "No!" with arms and voice and conviction. Dance with the beauty of your body, with all its creaks and quirks and limitations. There is no other way to bring Christ to this world today than through the very body you have been given in which to house his Spirit.

For now, I dance in churches, calling for the liberation of our beautiful bodies, so that we can come alive to the power of justice and the gentle embrace of tenderness in our worship and walk with God. I believe that in church

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we must practice the movements and behaviors we need to transform our world. So I dance in church. And then I go out and dance in the world. And I pray that I might be an instrument of the kingdom come. Let me say it this way:

Putting Flesh On

I dance in these hallowed halls.
I give my all.
I leap and bend
and bow before the Lord.
I die in waters and am
reborn.
I dance the dirge
and emerge
laughing.
I speak the psalms
with body and bone.
I run down aisles,
set free.
I sprinkle incense on

coals
and my hands rise
with holy smoke.
I retreat into caves
under altars
and set foot on
altar rails -
reaching beyond.
I drum feet on
empty chairs
and balance on the
edge of stairs,
I dance.
Music sets me on
fire
like the spirit
and blows me
beyond myself,
streamers flying.
I stand before statues and
they call to me.
Candles dance in my hands.
Rhythm rocks me
in the arms
of the One

who gave me birth.
I give thanks for
my body.
Here I come
to know
a God
who puts
flesh on
and is not afraid
to dance,
wild and free -
ever calling me...
calling you -
"Dance
with me ...
dance
in me ...
dance!"

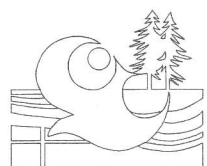
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