

Marching or Dancing?

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Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

Luke 22:24-27

A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

I want to talk to you briefly this morning on the subject - Marching or Dancing? What I want to do is float a metaphor out there for us that I think is a very helpful one - Marching vs Dancing.

You could say that there are basically two ways to go through life - marching or dancing? You could say that there are basically two ways of doing

church - marching and dancing. Maybe the metaphor applies to all groups and gatherings, including our families? Marching or dancing?

Now both ways of living have their strengths. And both have their weaknesses. Perhaps there's a time to march and a time to dance, as Solomon might say? But if you had to choose one as your *modus operandi*, your primary way of being, way of living, which one would you choose?

Now, I think we'd have to admit that

1. Marching is simpler and easier. Dancing is more complicated.

I googled "different types of marches" this week. I got 456,000 search results. Most of which I did not read. There's a Quick March, a Slow March, Half Step, Double Time, Mark Time and Easy March. I even found an article on how to march in a marching band. (from a "Wiki-How to do anything" article)

- 1 - Stand at the proper attention position.
- 2 - Step off with the left foot
- 3 - Plant the heel of your foot into the ground with your toes raised for your first step
- 4 - Roll the rest of your foot down to the ground
- 5 - Repeat with the right foot and alternate.
- 6 - Maintain proper body posture

Got it! I can learn how to march from an on-line article and YouTube video. But I could never learn how to dance from "Wiki-How to do anything. Dancing is harder and more complicated. As I mentioned, when I googled, "different types of marches" I got 456,000 results. When googled "different types of dances," and I got 13,400,000 search results. Dancing comes with a few more choices!

I think being a Christian is more like dancing than marching. Because there are not just 5 basic ways to be a Christian. There are as many ways to be a Christian as there are Christians. II Cor. 5 - *"If anyone is in Christ there is a new creation."* The Greek word for "creation" there is the same word as "species." If anyone is in Christ a new species is created, something the world has never

seen before - you and Christ together form something perfectly unique. So we don't say in the church, "This is how each of you must march! This is the Trinitarian March. Learn it and Get in step!" Instead, we say, "Let's Dance. Find your rhythm. Feel the drumbeat of God. Feel God pulsated through your body and spirit, and dance the dance the Spirit is creating in you!"

Marching is easier. Dancing is more complicated.

Marching is more uniform. Dancing is more unique to each one of us.

Dancing makes room for individuality. It celebrates it!

2. I also believe it's fair to say that Dancing is more fun.

If I say to you, *"We're going on a 5 mile march today."* Would that get your adrenaline pumping? But if I said, *"After coffee hour downstairs, we're going to do some dancing! We've got a great band, a dance instructor if you want, but let's just have a great time together."* That's dancing.

Sometimes church can be more like marching. Churches like any organization can lose their joy. Church can become more like a march. *"Let's go people. Some of you aren't marching in step. Concentrate. Be more committed to the march! Let's move people. Let's move!"*

We pastors often take this approach. But think about how different it sounds from, *"Shall we dance? Shall we dance together?"* Nehemiah said long ago that, *"the joy of the Lord is our strength."* The Puritan Stephen Charnock - *"the more joyful a service is, the more spiritual."* St. Paul called Joy one of the *"fruits of the Spirit."* Where the Spirit of God is there is joy! If church is a God-thing, then joy should be one of the hallmarks of our gatherings.

Imagine asking someone, *"How was the dance?"* And they responded, *"Well, it was quite serious, predictable, and regimented."* *"Sounds more like a march?"* Dances are more fun. Marches are more serious.

Please don't misunderstand - There is a time to dance and time to march; but which way should be dominant? And maybe when we have to march we can be like the USC Trojan Marching Band and others who combine marching and dancing!

3. Here's another difference between Marching & Dancing. Marching is clear-cut, black & white. Dances are more free-flowing. Less black & white.

Marches has clear lines of authority. In the military there's always someone in charge. Marches have leaders - whether it's the drill sergeant or the drum major. Dances don't necessarily have a clear-cut hierarchy. Power is top-down in a march. Power is shared in a dance. Now we need some organization in the church. But power and authority are not our primary way of getting organized. Relationship is. Service is.

Illustration. Years ago in my first church a person came onto the church council and said to me, *"I told my husband I've run this household for 30 years, I can certainly run the church."* I cringed. You don't run the church. You serve it.

In Luke 22, Jesus says, *"The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them . . . But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves . . . I am among you as one who serves."*

We're called to be like Christ - to lead with the heart of a servant. To lead with humility. Top-Down Structures are often about control and efficiency. And they don't dance very well. They can march, but they have trouble dancing, trouble with creativity.

4. Here's another difference between marching and dancing. Dances are more forgiving. Since Marching is so black and white, when you mess up it's a big deal. "You should have known better! March straight! Get in step! NOW!"

Illustration. I remember at my first church one day the lector made a mistake or two while reading a scripture lesson. After the service she apologized to me as if she'd insulted my mother. I thought to myself, *"Is that the kind of culture I've created in the church where you can't make a mistake, and if you do you should feel lousy about it?"*

Illustration. Contrast that with a story I heard at a pastor's conference. This pastor was talking about his church that had attracted many folks who were previously unchurched. He said it really stood out one day when a person got up to read the scripture lesson and she'd forgot to mark the second passage. All the sudden she came out with, *"Oh bleep! I can't find Philipians?"* When you make a mistake at a dance it's not as big of a deal.

Here's one more difference between marching and dancing.

5. Dances are always changing. Marching pretty much stays the same.

I've seen the high school marching band march several times in parades, and I've even watched a practice or two. And it hasn't changed much since when I was in high school marching band. But dances are always changing and new dances are invented all the time.

Illustration. I heard of a wedding photographer who became a pastor, and he was famous for saying, *"Wedding photographers should never become pastors, because in the church you can never get everyone to stand still at the same time."* That's helpful for us to remember. We'll always be a work in progress. And once we get everything perfectly organized and managed something else brand new will pop up.

I had fun playing with these images this week. I hope you've found it helpful and perhaps a new way of thinking about things. Let me summarize these thoughts:

1. Marching is simple. Dancing is complicated.
2. Marching is usually serious business.
 - Dancing is lighter. More joyful.
3. Marching is a top-down experience. It's fairly rigid.
 - In dancing, power is shared. It's more free-living.
 - The dance is mutually created by both parties.
 - Dancing is about relationships, not power and authority.
4. In Marching mistakes are a big deal - "Get in step!"
 - In dancing, just go with the flow. Improvise.
5. Marches seldom change. Dances are always evolving.

To paraphrase, Lee Ann Womack great song: *"I hope we dance."*
Think about it.