

What kinda music do you hear playing?

Well, if it's hip hop . . . you break dance.

If it's country . . . you two step.

If it's big band . . . you swing.

If it's Celtic . . . you jig.

And if it's disco . . . you boogie.

It's really pretty simple, right.

So naturally, when you hear a dirge . . . you mourn.

And when you hear the flute . . . you dance.

But crazy thing, Jesus tells us in this morning's Gospel, that people in His day had it all mixed up. Jesus says when "We played the flute for you . . . you did not dance". When "We sang a dirge . . . you did not mourn." For one reason or another, Jesus encountered many who moved to their own rhythm. Like, there might've been a dirge sounding, but instead of mourning . . . they danced. Then, if a flute played, instead of dancing . . . they mourned. Can you imagine such a picture? There you are at some funeral, all is tears and sorrow, and suddenly someone breaks into dance. Or, you're at a big party, with lots of laughter and excitement, and out of nowhere somebody comes moping by in sackcloth and ashes. Hard to picture, I know, but strangely that's what Jesus experienced everywhere He went.

For example, Jesus would go about from town to town, and He'd sing a dirge. He'd announce, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In other words, "Mourn for your sins, grieve for your transgressions, lament over your many iniquities; because you're staring God incarnate in the face." But there'd be these people like the Pharisees—these self-righteous, legalistic, law-abiding, holier-than-thou, moralists—and what they heard wasn't a dirge at all. No, instead of mourning on the outside . . . they were dancing on the inside.

To them, what they were hearing was no somber tune at all, but a happy song. They interpreted this dirge as being for all others, but not them. Surely it was meant for the likes of sinners, lowlifes, scumbags; not for the well-behaved boys that they thought they were. When they heard the dirge sound, it was like music to their ears—a reminder of how good they were and how bad everybody else was. It made them feel better about themselves. So, they didn't mourn . . . they danced.

Then, there'd be other times when Jesus would go around and pick up the tempo. He'd bring out the flute and play a toe-tappin' number, something like, "your brother who was dead is now alive, he who was lost is now found." In other words, "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." It was the kinda music you'd think anyone could get into—but not the Pharisees. Instead of dancing on the outside, they were mourning on the inside.

You see, to them this was no cause for celebration, but a somber occasion. *What, allow bad characters into God's kingdom? Offer forgiveness without cost? Love even the unlovable?* It was all too much for them. It hit their ears like some jarring cacophony—it was the worst thing they'd ever heard. So, instead of dancing they decided to sit that one out, grieving instead the loss of their own special status as people who never broke the rules. Rather, like spoiled children in the marketplace, they'd rather pout than play.

Then, about 1,500 years later, things still weren't much different. Whether they heard the dirge or the flute, Martin Luther found that people were still out of step with Jesus. After going into a monastery, making a pilgrimage to Rome,

getting a closer look at the church hierarchy, Luther discovered it seemed like everyone was grooving to their own beat. On the one hand, Luther would hear God's Law loud and clear—no doubt, a dirge—but he didn't see much mourning. Instead, like the Pharisees, he'd watch as popes and cardinals and bishops danced. They could actually capitalize on grace—sell the forgiveness of sins at a profit. So with every clink of a coin in their coffers, they were hearing their song.

Then, on the other hand, when Luther finally got to hear the flute play, when at long last the sweet song of the Gospel of Jesus Christ came within earshot, he was surprised not to find many dancing. Again, like the Pharisees, the higher ups in the church mourned for what they were losing. Their power and control was being threatened; people were now finding out that God's grace doesn't come with a price tag. Clearly, the church needed a reformation—learning how to once again follow her Lord's lead. And fortunately, Luther's left a legacy we still celebrate today—teaching us rightly to mourn at a dirge but to dance when the flute plays.

So, today what sorta music do you hear? If Jesus was singing a dirge . . . do you think you'd mourn? Or . . . would you dance? If Jesus was playing His flute . . . would you dance? Or . . . would you mourn? Are we always good at following His direction, or . . . are we sometimes off? Is there still need yet today—501 years later—for reformation?

I have this one friend, his name is Shane. He goes to church, is pretty involved there. His family faithfully attends every Sunday. They're active in the outreach efforts to their greater community. Yet, when Jesus plays a dirge . . . Shane dances.

I mean, he's heard the flute play before. Nothing gets him on his feet like the full and free forgiveness of sins; nothing moves him quite like the inclusivity of God's grace for everyone. But for some reason that's the only tune he ever hears. That flute seems to drown out all else . . . even when it stops playing. While the dirge of God's Law might be blaring, calling us to repent—to mourn our sins, to change our ways—somehow he's still dancing. How out of place—to dance to a dirge!

Then, I also knew this girl named Naomi. She too came to church every Sunday. She heard the Good News that on account of Jesus her slate had been wiped clean. She'd even kneel at the altar and taste for herself the sweetness of God's grace. But somehow even with the beautiful flute music playing . . . she still went around mourning.

Lord knows why that was. An overactive conscience maybe? Low self-esteem, like maybe she thought God saw her the way everyone else did? Maybe she thought the worse she felt about her sins, the more worthy it made her of God's love? Or maybe she just understood better than any of us the extreme gravity of sin? But whatever it was, the flute could be swirling beautifully all around her . . . but to Naomi, it was forever stuck in a minor key. She couldn't hear that her sins were once-and-for-all nailed to a cross; that she now had the righteousness of Christ—which would be enough to make anyone else get up and dance. No, all that was lost on her—still ringing in her ears was the dirge. But imagine that, mourning . . . at a dance!

Again, right now, what music do you hear? Well, is it a dirge? Is it a flute? Just what is it that Jesus is playing right now? My guess is, we still need reformation—it's like Luther said, *Ecclesia semper reformanda est*, which means "The church always needs to undergo reformation."

I mean, I don't know about you, but the only thing I'm hearing this moment . . . is a dirge. Finding out that I might be following the wrong tune—dancing when I should be mourning or mourning when I should be dancing—all I can hear is the sound of my own funeral. If you also are out of sync with your Lord like I am, maybe you hear it too—a sad, somber, haunting requiem with your name on it. I mean, what else would be playing for the likes of us, people who can't even get *this* right? For you and me, it's curtains, isn't it? But hey, how 'bout that! You and I aren't out of rhythm for once, but as we lament our sins we're actually following our Lord's cue. It is a dirge . . . and here we are mourning.

But here's the thing, if it's a dirge . . . it's not for you. It's not your funeral . . . it's His. If anyone's dying, it's Him! You see, He knows we all need reformation. 1,500 years before the Ninety-Five Theses ever got nailed to the castle church door, Jesus got nailed to a cross. Before much ink had been spilled, Jesus shed His blood. Before there was any debate, Jesus ended the debate on God's verdict for all of us—"Not guilty." On our behalf, He paid for our mistakes, put right what

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we'd gotten wrong, made everything as it should be. He allowed Himself to be deformed, so we could be reformed. And so we are—to this day, that reformation continues in our lives. Forgiven, set free from sin, made holy, Jesus makes us the best version of ourselves we can be, reforming us into a new me and a new you.

So, d'you hear that? No dirge anymore . . . it's giving way to something else . . . What's *that*—is that a flute? It sounds just *heavenly*. It's playing for you. After all, you remember what Jesus once said, don't you? "There's more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents". Well, that must be some party then.

Hope you brought your dancing shoes! What'll it be this time? The Jitterbug? . . . The Charleston? . . . The Electric Slide? I know Lutherans don't usually dance in church, but . . . He's playing a flute for us . . . better dance! Better dance!