

Fully Embraced by God
John 1:1-14
25 December 2010
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Do you remember the first school dances you ever went to? I remember going to school dances in Middle School. Looking back at it, I actually wonder what the planners were thinking. I understand it's about creating normative social skills among the next generation of people. But really, does it have to be in middle school? Middle School is about the most awkward time of life. Girls are a foot taller than boys. Arms are longer than legs. You know your body is changing, yet you pray to God that no one would notice.

I think a Middle School dance is one of those necessary experiences where we first learn to overcome fear. Remember back to those days. Everyone's boppin' around on the dance floor, having a great time. Then, the music slows. Panic sets in. What do I do? Do I find a dance partner or run for the hills? And if and when I find a dance partner, what's the appropriate distance to stand from the person? Inevitably you end up with this awkward arrangement of 50 "couples" on the dance floor looking like dancing penguins (demonstrate). No one really has the courage to embrace their dance partner. It's just a slow steady waddle. Eventually, after some practice the fear dissipates and the dance gets easier. But it takes some courage to come close to another person and trust to make the dance work.

Sometimes it seems our relationship with God can be like an awkward Middle School dance (demonstrate again). God seems so big, so distant, so holy, so unembraceable. We fumble and bumble in faith, we get tripped up on fear; we lose our way in the darkness; we get hung up on the power and privilege we hold over and against others and the power that is held over and against us. It's not as though we can't see the holiness of God, if but dimly. It's just that we can't seem to wrap our hands around this God. And maybe it's sometimes that we're not sure if we want to get close to this God. God always seems to be messing with things, changing things. God is always making the broken whole, lifting up the down trodden and the afflicted,

confronting the evils of this world. As great as that all sounds in theory; if we're going to get close to that then it means that we need to be ready to change. It seems to be easier to be gripped by fear rather than God. And that fear makes it difficult to dance, let alone be in relationship with God. Yet I think in our heart of hearts, we yearn for security and intimacy with the holy even as we stumble through life. We hope for something, someone to come and save us, someone to steady our stance and refresh our life.

God sees our struggles. He hears the cries of his people. Cries that ring out from us and from those who have come before us. They are the cries of Scripture, where the psalmists ask, "How long, O Lord, will you forget me, will you turn your face from me?" I'm sure there have been times in your life where this question has come to mind or even been uttered from your lips. I've certainly felt this way before.

These are the cries of the prophets who call for mercy, "Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me! O Lord, be my helper!" I think of the devastation of natural disasters from around the world in the last few years, Chile, The Gulf Coast, The Christmas Tsunami in Indonesia, and can hear the cries of those people in this passage. I hear the voices of those that I've talked to over the year about loved ones lost and hear the echoes of this call in their grief and their questions.

And God does not stand idly by. God comes to embrace us, to dance with us. Those who have experienced God's grace know what a relief it is. One psalmist sang these praises, "You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever."

When God sees our struggle to dance through life on our own, and watches us trip over our feet in darkness, despair and sin, God comes to invite us into the dance of Christ. John says, "In him is life and life is the light of all people".

John grabs a hold of us in this poetic telling of Christ's entrance into the world and shifts our perspective about the distance we feel from God with these words, "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born not of blood or the will of the flesh or the will of man, but of God."

John suggests that Christmas is not about Jesus being born into *our* world. Instead, John tells us that Christmas is about our birth into *God's* world, into what God has been doing from the very beginning; creating life and light for all people.

From the beginning of time, God has been dancing. It's the most graceful and majestic dance in all creation. There from the beginning God has danced as Creator, Redeemer and Holy Spirit. And from that dance, creation is born. Water flows. Mountains rise. Fields of fruits, and vegetables, and grains flourish. People are born, love is found, and life is sustained. It is a beautiful dance.

Early Christians called this image of the Trinity the perichoresis; which literally means "the God who dances around." A famous Orthodox icon painted by Rublev depicts this scene with the three persons of the Trinity encircled, with a noticeable space in the circle. For centuries, this space has been interpreted as a space for you, for us. It is a space where God invites us into the dance, where we are fully embraced by the God of hope, and love and peace and joy. This space is where we experience the light and life of Christ who comes to lead us in the dance of God.

In Christmas, we are assured that we no longer stumble in darkness alone as we try to dance through life. The Word becomes flesh and lives among us. The Christ has come to us in light to bring us life. Fear is dispersed and hope is ushered in.

So, I hope you have come into Christmas this year ready to put your dancing shoes on. Christ has come to fully embrace us with hope, ready to give us steps of grace and love. God is here to teach us to dance our way out of fear, out of darkness and into the brilliant light of life. Merry Christmas...Amen