

Wondering about Michal (15B) (2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19)

Maybe she's more than just a wet blanket.

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A quick scan of this reading tells you who is at the center of this story.

David's name appears 13 times in 13 verses, and the ark of God or the Lord shows up 14 times. But as you scan, another name, appearing only once, may stand out. For a single moment, the spotlight turns to shine on Michal, daughter of Saul.

After a cursory read, you might think Michal is just a wet blanket—a buzzkill foil to David's golden-boy warrior/king/musician/party animal. It's a day of extravagant ritual and celebration, and everyone else is singing, dancing, shouting, and rejoicing, with David dancing more wildly and singing more loudly than anyone. But here is Michal, sitting above it all with a scowl on her face. And she's not just mildly displeased or in a temporary funk—the text tells us she sees David's dancing and she *despises him in her heart*.

I wonder how often someone hears this story and leaves with the impression that Michal is just a party pooper, or just a wife caught up in petty jealousy. Because if you don't know Michal's history with David—and boy, do they have a history—and if you are only hearing this story as it is presented in the lectionary (without the death of Uzzah and David's reaction, which shows him in a more complicated light), it's hard to understand why Michal would *despise* David. He's the hero, right?

If you read a few verses further, you get another glimpse into Michal and David's relationship. Sure, Michal is not in any better mood in those verses, but when they

talk, you see that David isn't exactly a prince (well, he *is* king, but—you know what I mean). You begin to see why Michal reacts with such bitterness to David's starring role in the festivities.

It may not be possible or even advisable to include David's conversation with Michal in the reading of this passage in worship, or to weave a recap of David's and Michal's history into your sermon. There's a lot going on in this passage, even without all of that.

But the story does turn the spotlight onto Michal for that brief moment, which, I think, invites and challenges the preacher to acknowledge Michal's presence and perspective in some way, even if the focus of the sermon is elsewhere.

So how might one acknowledge, in a brief but meaningful way, a voice from the margins of a story? I think there might be a tool we can borrow for this from the [Godly Play](#) approach to religious education.

In Godly Play, a storyteller tells a Bible story to children, then opens a time of reflection by asking "I wonder" questions. For example, after telling the Godly Play [Parable of the Good Shepherd](#) (which combines imagery from Psalm 23 and the parables in John 10), the storyteller might ask:

- I wonder if you have ever been led near to the cool, clear water?
- I wonder if you have ever had to go through a place of danger? I wonder how you got through?
- I wonder if you have ever been lost?
- I wonder if you have ever been found?

"I wonder" questions might be a way to briefly bring worshipers' attention to the different perspectives within a text, even if they are not the central focus of a sermon. To acknowledge Michal's perspective, for example, you could include an "I wonder" moment like the following in your sermon:

- While everyone else is singing, dancing, and shouting, Michal is not. I wonder if you have ever been part of a celebration but felt left out?
- While everyone else is cheering for David, Michal has another perspective. I wonder if you have ever felt the sweetness of a relationship go sour?

For me, listening to the voices at the edges of our sacred stories is an important theological practice that can also help shape our attention and action in our daily

lives. I'm hopeful that this "wondering" approach might help me—and maybe you—to consistently name the way the Michals shine in our stories, even when David is at center stage.