

Weekend of Sunday, July 11, 2021
7th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 15/Proper 10/Year B
First Reading: 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19
Sermon Title: “Dancing Before the Lord”

Theme

The ark of the covenant, long a symbol of God’s presence with Israel, is brought into Jerusalem by David. The entrance of the ark into this new capital city is marked by great rejoicing, and David himself is the chief dancer. His wife Michal, King Saul’s daughter, considers such behavior undignified.

Text

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. ²David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. ³They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart ⁴with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. ⁵David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

^{12b}So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; ¹³and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. ¹⁴David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. ¹⁵So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

¹⁶As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

¹⁷They brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the LORD. ¹⁸When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts, ¹⁹and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

Sermon

The gospel reading for today did not captivate my attention so I am going to preach on the Old Testament lesson from second Samuel because it is a great story. But for you to understand the joy in this story you need to know something of the context from which this joy emanates.

The Ark of the Covenant was understood to be the seat of God as God dwelled among his people on earth. It also contained the second set of stone tablets on which Moses dictated the Ten Commandments, a jar of manna, and Aaron's staff. When the Israelites were traveling or in battle the Ark led the way carefully carried on poles by priests. When the ark was not traveling it was kept in the Tabernacle, a very ornate tent that made mobile worship possible during the forty years of wandering.

Israel's first king, Saul, did not honor God and lacked the character that God wanted and God did not bless his leadership. Under Saul, the ark was even captured once by the Philistines but having it in their possession brought them only trouble in the form of affliction with hemorrhoids and a plague of mice. Things got so bad for the Philistines that they returned the ark after seven months along with an offering consisting of golden images of the hemorrhoids and mice wherewith they had been afflicted. Please don't allow your minds to wander off over just what a golden image of a hemorrhoid might have looked like.

David was the second king of Israel. As the new king, David would make mistakes but he always repented and never forgot that God was there to help him. In scripture, David is regarded as a man after God's own heart. One of King David's first acts was to make Jerusalem his capital city. The heathen Jebusites there on Mt. Zion thought no one could capture it, but they didn't know David's God. With God's help, David conquered them and built a strong fortress there.

David also built a beautiful royal palace in Jerusalem. His friend King Hiram of Tyre floated cedar logs down the coastline for David's house so it would be grand and beautiful. A house made of cedar wood was special in those days as most houses were made from mud bricks and stone.

Soon after David made his plans to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The ark had been kept in the house of Abinidab for about twenty years. Taking 3,000 of Israel's best men, he had the ark set on a new cart and brought down from Abinadab's house. Abinadab's sons Uzzah and Ahio drove the oxen hitched to the cart. David and his men went joyfully before it, playing on their harps, symbols, and tambourines, What a happy procession that must have been!

This is the first part of the reading. But then notice that the editors of the lectionary skipped a section. Want to know what happened in the part that was skipped?

The procession was happy and joyous ... until one of the oxen stumbled and, and probably without thinking, Uzzah reached his hand out to steady the ark. But, you see, there were very specific instructions from God himself on how the ark was to be handled and moved. Abinidab and his sons had not consulted the rules and God was so angry to see his command about moving the ark disobeyed that he struck Uzzah dead on the spot.

How do you think David and his men felt then? Since it had been his idea to move the ark, David seemed to blame himself. He was so upset he left the ark in the house of Obed, an Israelite who lived nearby and sorrowfully took his company back to Jerusalem.

During the three months that Obed possessed the ark, he experienced great blessings and so that encouraged David to try to move the ark again. This time, however, he was careful to follow the instructions God gave through Moses. He sent priests down to bring the ark back on their shoulders with poles, saying, "...the first time the Lord our God broke out against us because we did not consult him about the proper order." To further show their desire to please the Lord, the people offered sacrifices along the way and David led the procession with complete and utter abandon. The reading from Second Samuel is the coverage of that procession.

And here is where I would like to make a few observations.

David didn't hold back anything in his expression of worship. He didn't dance out of obligation but out of heartfelt worship. He was glad to bring the ark of the Lord into Jerusalem. This expression of David's heart showed that he had a genuine

emotional link to God. For David this moment was personal and he didn't care what anyone else thought.

We don't think that dancing is strange when our team scores points. We don't think it is strange when the winning touchdown is scored and the player making the touchdown does a dance in the endzone – we have come to expect it. We think nothing at hands raised at a concert. Why should we think those same expressions inappropriate in worship to God? I might also point out that David's dancing was appropriate in the context. This was a parade with a marching band, a grand procession. David's dancing fit right in.

The scripture says that David was wearing a linen ephod. It is a mistake to think that David was immodest. 1 Chronicles (15:27) indicates that David was dressed just like all the other priests and Levites in this procession. But David wasn't a priest, he was the king. In this context, David's linen ephod means he set aside his royal robes and dressed just like everyone else in the procession. He humbled himself before the Lord. He was not going to be the grand marshal of this, God's parade.

But not everyone was filled with joy that day. David's wife, Michal, who by the way was the previous king's daughter, thought that David's exhibition was undignified for a king and the scripture says "She despised him in her heart." David's wife Michal didn't appreciate David's exuberant worship. She felt it wasn't dignified for the King of Israel to express his emotions before God. Can't you just hear her saying, "My father would have never done that!" But a little later David would rebuke her saying,

"It was before the Lord, who chose me instead of your father and all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel. Therefore I will play music before the Lord. And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight."

There was a great celebration when the ark finally reached Jerusalem and David celebrated by giving all the people gifts of bread, meat, and raisin cakes. Then priests were appointed so that sacrifices could be offered each morning and evening for the people, just as God had commanded in the law of Moses. David gave the people the opportunity to worship their God and to make sacrifices that would

restore them to the right relationship with God. Can you see how this was a great cause for celebration?

God was very pleased with David's reverence and told him that he would set up David's kingdom to last forever and someone from his family would always be its king. After David died, one of his sons, Solomon, would build a house for the Lord. They called it a temple. That was enough for David. With gladness in his heart, he went before the Lord to praise him for all these wonderful promises.

In this reading, David was celebrating his being anointed King of Israel. He was also celebrating the founding of a capital city. Jerusalem would be home where the ark of the covenant would finally reside after all those years of wandering in the desert and therefore it would be the home of God too. He was delighted about all this and spared no emotion or self-control before the Lord. And he did this before his subjects! Think of the witness he gave that day.

I think this reading indicates that God is pleased when our worship is lively and celebrative. This can be difficult for us - Lutherans especially, but then we have the doctrine of grace on our side.

Worship should not be a dudge. It should represent our appreciation of the grace God has already shown us in the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, don't you think?

Speaking only for myself, my life in Christ has experienced much joy, and yet I don't often express it. Maybe it doesn't feel Lutheran. But I think that is contrary to the story we have heard today. The life God has given us is great. The grace the Lord Jesus has given us is invaluable. We should celebrate it and even risk dancing!

Prayer

Loving God, forgive us when we worship you and it sounds like the last thing we want to be doing at that moment. Inspire us to lift our voices and sing and yes, maybe even dance a bit, for your love shown us in Jesus Christ is truly worth our celebration. Thank you and all glory and honor be to you. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen