

**2 Samuel 6:1-19**

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. <sup>2</sup>David 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. <sup>3</sup>They 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 <sup>4</sup>with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. <sup>5</sup>David 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.

<sup>6</sup>When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it. <sup>7</sup>The anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God struck him there because he reached out his hand to the ark; and he died there beside the ark of God. <sup>8</sup>David was angry because the LORD had burst forth with an outburst upon Uzzah; so that place is called Perez-uzzah, to this day.

<sup>9</sup>David was afraid of the LORD that day; he said, "How can the ark of the LORD come into my care?" <sup>10</sup>So David was unwilling to take the ark of the LORD into his care in the city of David; instead David took it to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. <sup>11</sup>The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months; and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household.

<sup>12</sup>It was told King David, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; <sup>13</sup>and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling.

<sup>14</sup>David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod.

<sup>15</sup>So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. <sup>16</sup>As 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. <sup>17</sup>They 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. <sup>18</sup>When 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, <sup>19</sup>and 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.

Do you know that in our Christian tradition, there have been rules against many things, and some of those rules continue? Can we name some – Alcohol, gambling, playing cards, dancing. I've heard it said that one of the fears about dancing, especially for young people is that it could lead to sex. There's a joke about the Baptists that puts a spin on it, that you shouldn't have sex, because it could lead to dancing. But today's scripture focuses on dancing. Throughout the summer, the lectionary is offering us the stories of David. A month ago we heard about the anointing of David; a few weeks ago, Paul Vahey paved the way to hear about David & Goliath. Today we encounter the uninhibited Dancing David in praise to God.

But before we get to the dancing part of the story, we need to understand the background and context. It begins with the symbolism and significance of the Ark of the Covenant.

The Ark was a traditional Hebrew holy object, a portable shrine. According to sacred text, it had been created by Moses following divine instructions during the time of the exodus. It symbolized Israel's unique relationship with Yahweh because it held the tablets given to Moses. The ark of the Covenant is first described in Exod 25:10-22. The description given there envisages a box of acacia wood, overlaid with gold and with four rings at the corners so that it can be carried using poles. The ark led Israel through its wilderness wanderings. To the Israelites, it was much more than a box holding some special tablets! It was the embodiment of the presence of Yahweh, a symbol of God's presence in Israel's midst. It was used to lead Israel into battle against a foe, and as a portable throne for the invisible presence of God. So the ark of the covenant was a very powerful symbol to Israel

At one point, the Ark was taken to battle and lost to the Philistines. Although possession of the ark normally brought its possessors good fortune, it spelled disaster for the Philistines. They were visited with bubonic plague, faced economic disaster and experienced military defeat while holding the ark. Therefore, they decided to rid themselves of this curse. Placing the ark on a cart, they hooked up a couple of milk cows and sent them off at a cross-roads without a driver to see if the cows would head for Israel on their own. They did. Eventually, they showed up at the farm of Abinadab who brought it in to his house, dedicated one of his sons to be its priest, and there it remained for twenty years during the reign of Saul. It is at this point that our Hebrew lesson for today picks up the tale.

David remembers the Ark and the role it has played in the life of the people as they travelled in the wilderness and how it led them into battle. David's journey has been long and difficult, from pasture to palace, from shepherd boy to prince, from warrior to powerful king whose reign promises peace for the people at last, and finally, a home of their own. David had secured his kingdom. He had been crowned by popular consent over both the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, merging them into one. He had taken the city of Jerusalem as his capital, making it the political and economic center of the nation. He had eliminated the threat of the Philistines, and beginning to build an empire. Now it was time for David to consolidate his power by turning Jerusalem into a center for Yahweh worship as well as his political and economic capital. David, in establishing Jerusalem as his seat of power, wanted to restore the ark to the center of the people's shared life, and he went to fetch it from its temporary home. In a sense, the ark had always had a temporary home, moving with the people in their journeys.

What follows next is a brief snapshot of three crucial people in this story.

The text tells us that the Ark of the Covenant was moved to Jerusalem in two stages. First, it was picked up at Abinadab's farm and placed on an oxen-pulled cart to be taken to Jerusalem. Do you remember that the Ark had rings on the side – it was meant to be carried with poles through the rings. A little foreshadowing. It was taken in grand

procession toward Jerusalem, led by King David who “danced before the Lord”. But the procession didn’t make it to Jerusalem.

When the cart hit a rut in the road, it swayed precipitously, and it looked like the ark would come crashing off the cart. One of Abinadab’s sons, Uzzah, a priest, put out his hand to steady the ark – and when he touched it, he is struck dead immediately. That sobered the party instantly! He died attempting to do a noble thing: “The Lord’s anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there before the ark of God.”

In the worldview of that time a sacred object could bring good and harm. It was not meant to be touched by a common person and when this occurred as with Uzzah, he died for his breach of etiquette. The crucial question is why is this story portrayed as God striking Uzzah dead? Thinking about this makes us uncomfortable. Is God not someone who is consistently revealed as the giver of life? Personally I cannot imagine God choosing violence in this way. On a more symbolic level, as Christians have reflected on Uzzah’s death, one insight reappears over and over: it is fatal to take charge of God. Uzzah officiously assumes responsibility for keeping God safe from the mud and dust of the world. After the Philistines had entrusted the Ark to two cows, one might imagine that the priest who was ordained to take care of the Ark would know that God would not allow the Ark to come to any harm. But Uzzah is protecting God.

David is mad at God. He **completely** loses his temper with God when he sees the death of Uzzah. He is outrageously furious! David’s anger didn’t get him killed. David is not very careful or proper with God. After Uzzah’s death David goes home to Jerusalem; he has time to think. And his anger turns to fear. He wasn’t sure his new kingdom could hold this God. Three months passed, and David had a chance to think it all over. He decided that possessing the ark was worth the risk of an angry God. So he and his priests do some homework & return to the farm of Obed-edom, and this time carried the ark as prescribed by the Law, and made sacrifices every six paces to appease the wrath of God (they weren’t taking any chances). Thus, David and his entourage – with the whole choir - harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals. This time they are going to bring the Ark home to Jerusalem. David puts himself at risk. He leads by dancing. And he danced with a kind of reckless abandon, without consideration for social propriety. He was on the edge of mystery, of glory. So, he danced.

The scene in **2 Samuel 6** depicts vibrant, colorful, noisy, dynamic celebration as David and his followers bring the ark of God into Jerusalem. The ark, containing the tablets of the covenant, connected the past with the present and signified God’s powerful presence with the people. He danced before the Ark, reckless and joyful. David was never in a position to take care of God; he was always in a position of being taken care of by God. So, David had learned to live openly, recklessly and exultantly before God. He was worshipping, responding to the living God. In this sense, we need dancing lessons from King David. This sort of thing, joy before the Lord, always seems to draw some in while it puts others off. Not everyone is in a party mood. Such was the case here as David’s wife Michal, Saul’s daughter, who looked on with complete disgust.

Michal watches the proceedings and her husband's role from a window, from a distance, and sees him dancing and leaping. She is the uninvolved critical observer in this parade. And then she's upset: what will people think of the king, her husband, dancing half-naked in the street? Michal was first embarrassed and then contemptuous of David's dance. She was stately, respectable, proper, in control, careful. She wanted a husband who acted more like the image of the king she had in her mind.

What does our culture, our society, tell us about dancing? Does it celebrate it? Does it embrace and expand upon it?

Or does it narrow it, relegate it to the back room, the bar room, the stage? It is our human nature to dance? As children, we all dance, we all embody the sounds of the world in a very physical way. But at some point we lose our freedom. We become inhibited. We live in a culture where to be human is not necessarily to be dancer, where we are taught to judge the type of dancer we become. Does that mean the music ceases to pulse around us, within us, and through us? No, but it is no longer released to the world through movement and gesture. Do you remember when it happened for you? At the age of 5, 8, 12, 30, 70, haven't lost it yet? We say far too easily. "Oh, I'm not a musician." "No, I'm not an artist." "I can't dance."

How are we as individuals transformed by our dance, transformed by our gathering? By our faith? How are we, like David, expressing what we know of God, what we have experienced of God,

Like David, our dance must be done with all our might. It must be a dance that acknowledges the unique, limited, often uncoordinated way in which each of us tries to embody and express anew the music and breath of the spirit moving in us. It must acknowledge that the dance we do is an expression of our humanity.

Many Christians today are like David. We desire the blessings of God, but we are wary of encountering God's holiness. Yes, we may receive blessings, but we may also suffer because of our proximity to the holy. It is not that we might be struck dead because we touch a holy relic. The primary danger we face in our encounter with the holy is that we cannot come close to God and escape unscathed. When we truly see God at work, we will either be compelled to join in or we will have to reject God altogether. Are we willing to take the risk?

Twice we are told that David "*danced before the Lord with all his might.*" David and all the house of Israel dance "*before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.*" They dance! And not a little side-to-side sway, and clap, but "with all their might" they dance! Something closer to a break dancing, hip hop boogie. And David, clad in a ceremonial garment of prayer and worship, presents the gift of his joy. But it doesn't stop there. The incarnate celebration continues through a shared meal, as David blesses the people in the name of the LORD of hosts, and distributes food among all the people. That's right, he feeds them – "the whole multitude," both men and women – with bread and meat and a cake of raisins! The dance becomes a banquet, a royal meal, of joy, of life, of abundance and community.

We gather today to dance. Foolishly, unapologetically, and beautifully we dance. We sing to each other ballads of our common history. Our bodies, our voices, and our movements become vehicles for expressing our relationship with the divine.

How passionate is our worship, how exuberant our praise, how deep our awe at what God is doing in our lives and in the life of the world? Do we really know what it feels like to rejoice “with all our might” because God is present in our lives? Have we ever felt so full of exultation about Who God Is that we want to dance without inhibition, right in front of our family, our friends, and our community? Or are we closer to being the “frozen chosen” who sit immobile in our pews?

May God help us as a congregation, to be as fully alive and passionate to God as David was. Amen