

Dirty Dancing?

A Sermon in the Perfectly Imperfect Series by Pastor Rob Hamilton
Delivered on February 13, 2022

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19 NRSV

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. **2** 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. **3** 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 **4** with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. **5** 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. 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; **13** and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. **14** David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. **15** So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. **16** 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. **17** 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. **18** 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, **19** 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.

Preamble

For those I haven't met yet, I am Rob Hamilton, Senior Pastor here at the United Methodist Church of Geneva. Thank you for sharing your time and spirit with me and this worshipping community either digitally or here on Hamilton Street in Geneva, IL.

We are in the 7th inning of a series that follows the Old Testament figure of David called 'Perfectly Imperfect' and we're looking at how God uses ordinary people for God's extraordinary purposes in the world. I've mentioned before that while David is often the main actor in the stories we are exploring, God is the director and as such these stories teach us a lot about God. So far, we've seen how God doesn't require perfection in order to be used by God. That God sees or discerns the human heart that is tuned to God's own heart and how God uses even the small and unexpected to deliver us from our the giants in our lives. We've even been able to see how God reconciles relationships to free us so that we can serve God faithfully and God empowers us to be peacemakers and agents of mercy.

Today, we've heard a story about the ark of the covenant - yes, the same ark from Indiana Jones- and it's considered to be very powerful and dangerous because it's considered God's holy seat on earth. King David is bringing it to a new home with honor in Jerusalem. In this story we are going to see how: **God calls us to worship with all our heart, soul and might so that we might humbly follow God daily.**

Let's see what we can learn about God in this story and apply it to our lives today. Before we go further, will you please pray with me and for me?

Prayer of Illumination

We praise you Lord Jesus for your presence in our midst. We thank you for the gift of worship today and for the space and nation to worship freely. I thank you for all you have gathered into these holy moments even as we are separated by time and space. Use my words and the mediations of all our hearts to be an act of true worship to you, not just in this worshipful setting but all the days of our lives. Amen.

Sermon

Today's story is an interesting one and I intentionally left a really interesting part out of the selection John read for us so that I could try to address it without us getting sidetracked.

Let me start with this teaching moment. When we approached Scripture to study it and learn from it one of the questions we have to discern is the intent of the author and we have to ask is that author being prescriptive, descriptive or both in writing. When we ask if the author is being **prescriptive we are discerning if the author trying to convey to the reader God's timeless will for all people, in all time and places** or is the author **describing what is happening in specific setting and specific point in time?** Or maybe both or neither are going on in the text... but typically we can tell if an author was received as prescriptive or descriptive based on tradition.

Let's see if we can figure out if our story today is prescriptive or descriptive. In our story today, is God prescribing that all people ought to enter worship or a capital city with intense dancing in liturgical garments, joyous music, sacrificing a ox and calf every sixth step or is the author describing how David brought the ark into Jerusalem as a devout act of worship and as such have to translate what we read into our context today?

Well today, we have acts of procession, we sometimes use liturgical dance, we often have joyous music as part of our worship, today we even have symbols. But that each worship service for the last 3000 years should be as prescribed in our reading is not something that has been carried on through tradition. This suggests that what we read today is primarily descriptive of a specific set of events.

So when we discern a text as being descriptive we have to use interpretive lenses to discern how God is speaking to us today in the text. Today, I'm going to use lenses of context, historical critical method and theology to get us to one take away from this story and that is **God calls us to worship with all our heart, soul and might so that we might humbly follow God daily.**

Let's begin with context and history. David is now king of the United Monarchy. All 12 tribes of the Israelites, God's people have grown to the point of uniting under the rule of a king. Part of this union is driven by how the tribes have grown past a loose grouping of tribes and into a nation. And part of the union is for protection from other nations, like the Philistines. David is anointed as the second major king of Israel because his heart is tuned to God's own heart and so David seeks to do God's will and because David follows God's will he has been successful in all his pursuits.

Now there is this thing called the Ark of the Covenant. Like I said before, it is the same ark from Indiana Jones. The Ark of the Covenant is the most sacred relic of the Israelites. God instructed Moses at Mount Sinai to build this gold covered wooden chest, that God would use to come and sit on when talking with Moses. Inside the ark is believed to be the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod and a Tupperware of manna (because we all know Tupperware keeps food fresh forever). This chest or ark is both powerful and dangerous because it is so holy and God's power, if not God's presence, is a part of it. There are stories of the ark's power in aiding military success of the Israelites¹ and in today's story the ark brought blessing and prosperity to those who had it in their possession.



Now for a while, the Philistines had captured the ark. When the ark was in their possession it brought hardship and calamity to who ever had it and so the Philistines actually returned the Ark to Israel and it was kept quietly in the house of Abinadab for twenty years.

Now because David seeks to be a person who honors God, David feels God's call to bring the ark to Jerusalem, the city of David so that God can be at the center of the nation. (Don't be fooled there are probably political motivations going on here too in this relocation, but that's not what I want us to focus on today). So David gets a crew and they head out to pick up the ark. Now David can't just rent a U-haul to pick up the ark, they have to have some sacred cows, a

¹ For a quick reference of some of these instances check out this wikipedia article: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ark_of_the_Covenant#Mobile_vanguard

priestly team and they have to build a cart to carry the ark and do it all with reverence and worship.

Now what is worship? Well part of worship is the straight definition: **an act of reverence, honor and adoration as marked with religious rites.** But **there is more to worship than just doing or saying the right things.** Jesus even is quick to point this out in recalling Isaiah in Matthew 15: 8-9 “This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me...” So I guess there is a ‘heart’ element to worship and it seems according to Jesus (and as we are about to see for David) that the inner part of heart of worship is more important than the outer or rites of worship to God. What happens in transporting the ark is a strong example of God’s desire to focus on the heart of worship.

So David is bringing the ark along with all the proper reverence and one of the oxen stumble and the ark starts to slide off the ark. One of the priestly servants Uzzah, notices the ark start to slide and he reaches out his hand to steady the ark - as I’m sure any of us would do. And for some reason Uzzah’s action angers God and God strikes Uzzah dead right on the spot! Yikes!



This angers David and David decides to leave the ark with Obed-edom the Gittite for three months. Now God doesn’t provide God’s rationale for why Uzzah had to die for steadying the ark. But how David reacts with anger and fear, it makes me wonder if David was bringing the ark to Jerusalem based on the council of others for political gain.

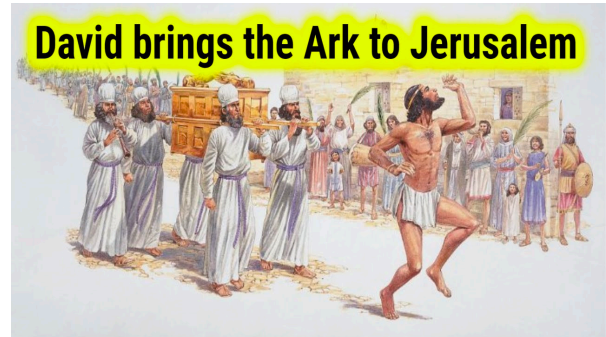
“Bring the ark into your city”, they’d say, ‘You’d have God’s power at your

hand, no one will prevail against you”, they’d say. This sounded good to the young King David and so he researched on how to bring the ark and did all the right things but was doing them for the wrong reasons. Praising God with his lips in vain, for his own benefit. I wonder if what is happening with the Uzzah scene is telling us that David’s heart wasn’t in the right place?

Is that us? Are we those who do the right things because we know how to be nice, proper, civil? Maybe that describes why we come to church, because we want to be seen as ‘good’ people? Or maybe this describes why we make sacrifices, not of animals, but of our time and money to help the less fortunate, because its just what good people do? Or maybe it's something else that we do with all the right actions but not with a heart of worship, not with a heart of love of God and neighbor? I also wonder if it took David three months to get his heart in the right place and then we have the rest of the story as John read?

For three months, I have wonder if David had to drown out the voices of power and prestige to hear God call for him to worship God with all his heart, soul and might so that he might humbly follow God daily. So now that David, realizes that having the ark in his city would keep God at the center of his life and leadership, that keeping the ark close to him in geography would help keep David’s heart close to God, he returns to Obed-edom the Gittite. This time David truly worships.

David has always been a man with a song in his heart and so the band starts playing and the music just flows through him and he dances. He dances, not because its required by God, but because for David he can pour all his heart, mind and might into worship in that way. David is so moved by love of God, he offers sacrifices every six steps and then as an act of worship feeds the nation with a feast as an act of love of God to all his neighbors.



David's worship seems foolish if not disgraceful to his wife (and Saul's daughter Michal). Michal accuses David of making such a scene for his own personal benefit... which he might have been doing three-months before, but this time David says if he embarrassed himself or the throne, then it was worth it because he was doing it for the Lord and not for the praise of the people.

David is teaching us here that **God calls us to worship with all our heart, soul and might so that we might humbly follow God daily.** Worship isn't for God, its for us. God doesn't need music, dancing, prayers or sacrifices. God needs and desires our hearts. **True worship aligns our hearts to God's own heart.** In the regular practice of true worship with our hearts, we learn to follow God humbly all of our days.

David's success as a leader has been dependent on keeping God at the center of his life. It keeps him humble. It keeps him connected to God and as a result David and the people of God are blessed.

Now, next week, we are going to see in David how easy it is to move God from the center of our lives to the edges with tragic consequences. But for us this week, I hope you will hear and answer **God's call for us to worship God with all our heart, soul and might so that we might humbly follow God daily.** If you are ready to answer God's call to true worship with all our hearts, souls and might in daily practice, I offer us to share in the popularized version of St. Patrick's prayer (I have cards made up to take with you) or you can reach out to our office and we can send you this prayer card - to help you keep God at the center of your life. This or any regular prayer is one way we answer **God's calls us to worship God with all our heart, soul and might so that we might humbly follow God daily so that God can use us for God's extraordinary purposes in the world.**

To help us keep God at the center and to focus our hearts on worship I offer you to take home this prayer card (or request one from our office). Its the known as the breastplate prayer of St. Patrick which is part of a much larger prayer attributed to him that he would pray at the beginning of everyday. I offer this common version for our benefit this week. Please join me in prayer using the card or what you see on your screens:

St. Patrick's Breastplate Prayer

Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me. Amen.