

“The Heart of Worship”

2 Samuel 6: 1-5, 12-19

August 4, 2019

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¹David 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.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

The story of King David and the Ark of the Covenant, or as it is called in this passage, the Ark of God, that is before us today is quite the story. We only heard part of it, but here's a brief recap. David was anointed King of Israel by the prophet Samuel back around 1025 BC, but it wasn't until the year 1010 BC that David was made king over all of Israel. His crowning followed a multi-year struggle between David and those loyal to the house of Saul. Soon after he

officially became king, David and his army twice defeated their foes the Philistines and defeated the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem. This meant that the Israelites could now call Jerusalem “home”. Once the nation of Israel was established in Jerusalem, David was determined to invite God into their midst in that place. So, he set about retrieving the Ark of the Covenant from its resting place in the land of the Philistines. The Ark of the Covenant was important because it was the physical symbol of God’s presence with the people Israel. The late Eugene Peterson describes the Ark in this way:

“The Ark of the Covenant was a rectangular box, not quite four feet in length and a little over two feet in depth and width. It was constructed of wood and plated with gold. Its lid of solid gold was called the mercy seat. Two cherubim, angel-like figures at either end, framed the space around the central mercy seat from which God’s word was honored. The Ark contained three items: the tablets of stone that Moses had delivered to the people from Sinai; a jar of manna from the wilderness years of wandering; and Aaron’s rod that budded. These objects were the continuing and reminding evidence that God worked among them: commanded them (the tablets), provided for them (the manna), and saved them (the rod). The Ark provided a center, giving a hard, historical focus to the revealed character of God whom they worshipped.”

The passage before us today tells the story of David going to retrieve the Ark. He takes an army with him and, rather than carrying the Ark on poles like was done in the past, David and his men put the Ark on a cart and guided it toward Jerusalem. Throughout the journey they were celebrating mightily by dancing and playing instruments like harps and cymbals. Part-way through their journey, though, something bad happened. One of the soldiers with David, a man named Uzzah, touched the Ark – something that was considered very irreverent – and he was struck down and he died beside the Ark. David didn’t understand this, so he became angry and abandoned the task at hand, leaving the Ark at the home of a man named Obed-Edom. Three months later, David realized that Obed-Edom and his household had been extremely blessed by the presence of the Ark, so David resumed the task of bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. Along the way a bull and fattened calf were sacrificed as a praise offering to God and when David succeeded in the task of bringing the Ark to Jerusalem, he joyfully danced in his underwear before the Lord with all of his might as the Ark entered the city.

A lot of people have written about what they think this passage means. What its significance is in the life of faith. What it reveals about the King known as David. Some say that David’s spectacle in the street was a political move made

to strengthen his power as king. Others say that David was participating in a cultic-type dance that wasn't even remotely in line with the Jewish religious traditions of his time. Still others say that David's dance was purely about him being the center of attention and putting his physical attractiveness on display. They all have valid points. It is somewhat of a complex passage and quite the story and maybe there are elements of truth to each of these theories. But to me, the message I find here much simpler – this is a story about worship. It is both about the act of worship and in its own way, it is instructing us on how to worship. The image of David dancing in the street in his underwear is an image of a man who is worshipping God and who, unlike Uzzah, has surrendered control. It really doesn't matter if his motives were pure, or if he was a bit narcissistic, or if it was in line with the religious order of the day. David found joy in bringing the Ark "home" to Jerusalem and did what was appropriate in the face of joy – he worshipped God.

As Christians, as Presbyterians, as people who have been engrafted onto the covenant that God made with our brother Abraham millennia ago, worship of God is at the heart of who we are as individuals and as a body of believers. Our Book of Order describes worship in this way – *“Christian worship joyfully ascribes all praise and honor, glory and power to the triune God. In worship the people of God acknowledge God present in the world and in their lives. As they respond to God’s claim and redemptive action in Jesus Christ, believers are transformed and renewed. In worship, the faithful offer themselves to God and are equipped for God’s service in the world.”* There is not a more holy, a more important thing we can do in the world than worship God. It is worship that brings us together. It is worship that humbles us. It is worship that centers us, guides us, restores us, heals us, and sends us.

When I think of worship, many images, experiences, and memories flood my mind. I've had many powerful worship experiences – in this sanctuary, in the sanctuary where I was baptized, married, and ordained, in the sanctuary where my children were baptized, in the auditorium at Montreat, on top of a Syrian castle, and inside a small Church of Scotland parish. It's the Church of Scotland parish experience that I want to share with you today. In 2015, I led a youth pilgrimage to Scotland where we explored Presbyterian heritage in Edinburgh, contemplated our individual faith journeys on the isle of Iona, and strengthened ecumenical ties in Glasgow. On the second to last day of our journey, we were headed toward our Glasgow in our motor coach, but our tour guide wanted us to see a few things in the precious loch-side town of Luss – we only had about 20

minutes to take in the view of Loch Lomond from the town dock and to see the parish church there. After taking some scenic group pictures, we quickly made our way from the dock to the parish church yard to see one of the best preserved Viking tombs in all of Scotland, dating back to the 9th century. Then our tour guide told us that we had three minutes to peek inside the church. It was small – nothing like the great St. Giles cathedral in Edinburgh that we had worshipped in earlier that week – but it was breath-taking. Beautiful stained glass, bright blue walls, dark wooden pews. We were all just taking it in when one of our group members suggested that we sing something, the doxology, she said. Now, our voices weren't perfect, but they blended together beautifully in that moment. The moment lasted no more than 30 seconds, but it was a moment of worship. We weren't in our Sunday best, we hadn't been anticipating this moment for months like we had the Sunday service in St. Giles Cathedral. We were tired from our 6 days of non-stop touring and we had been on a bus for 6 hours...but we had cause to rejoice. This moment was rather unexpected, but it was holy and special and truly a moment of worship -- worship of the living God.

There's a popular praise and worship song from the mid-2000's that I cannot get out of my head when I think of David dancing with all of his might while bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. It is called "Broken and Beautiful" and it goes like this –

There's a businessman
There's a widowed wife
There's a smiling face with
A shattered life
There's a teenage girl with a choice to make
It's crowded here in church today

And the preacher says as the sermon ends
Please close your eyes and bow your heads
Is there anyone in need of prayer
Jesus wants to meet you here
'cause we all fall short
We all have sinned
But when you let
God's Grace break in...

It's beautiful
Come as you are
Surrender your heart
Broken and beautiful

Well he'd never been to church before
But he came today as a last resort
His world was crashing in
And he was suffocating in his sin

But tears ran down
As hope rushed in
He closed his eyes
Raised his hands
Worshiping the God who can
Bring him back to life again

Cause there's nothing more beautiful to God
Than when his sons and daughters come
Broken

Alleluia
Come as you are
Surrender your heart
Broken and beautiful¹

Broken and beautiful. That's who we are. That's who David was. That's who our church is. That's who God loves and delights in. We are the broken and beautiful people who are made whole in the worship of God. It doesn't matter what our motives are when approaching worship, it doesn't matter if we have doubts, if we are angry with God, if we are preoccupied with our "to-do" lists, if we aren't fully prepared. If we offer ourselves to God in worship, even half-heartedly or hurriedly, or with questionable motives, God takes it and makes it something beautiful. Worship is our cause to rejoice and delight in God and God's cause to rejoice and delight in us. I'm broken and beautiful, just as you are. I might be

¹ Mark Shultz, "Broken and Beautiful," 2006.

broken in different ways. One person's brokenness might be hidden in the depths of their heart and soul, while another's seems to be fully on display. But, be assured – we are all broken. Be equally assured that we're all beautiful and precious in the sight of God. Because of Jesus, we are all more than worthy of approaching God in worship. King David, the ancestor of Jesus, just seemed to know this truth years before Jesus came on the scene. So, let's take the message of today – the simple and straight-forward message –

Alleluia

Come as you are

Surrender your heart

Worship the God who can bring you back to life again

Broken and beautiful.