

## Sermon July 12 2009 2Samuel 1-5, 12b-19 Dancing David

So our Scripture story today begins with the Ark of the Covenant (that which housed the Ten Commandments) *finally* making its way back to the Israelites. Up to this point it has been tossed around back and forth as a token/trophy among the Israelites and its enemies. But this time David's army has defeated the Philistines and Jerusalem will now become the new capital of the united kingdoms of the North and South. Perfectly and strategically placed, Jerusalem is a neutral territory that will now take on the enormous responsibility of housing the Ark.

Many of us are more familiar with the Ark of the Covenant from the famous movie series of *Indiana Jones* with Harrison Ford, than we are from the Ark's stories in the Hebrew Scriptures. *Indiana Jones* is able to **be** *Indiana Jones* because we all know that eventually the Ark of Scripture goes from tent, to Temple, to Temple-destruction and we're left not knowing what ever happened to the Ark of the Covenant...did it survive, and if so, where is it now? Again, that's *Indiana Jones'* job. In the meantime, while he's in search of the lost Ark we're going to want to be in search of our enthusiasm for God.

But before we get to that, let's just freshen our memories and summarize a couple things: First, someone in Bible study on Tuesday asked why do they call it an Ark? It's not a boat is it? No, it's not, and I do not know why they called it an Ark. It was really a rectangular wooden box measuring about six feet by three feet. The wood was acacia wood, which is said to be wood from The Tree of Life. Then the box was covered in gold. On each side of the rectangle Ark there were gold rings where wood poles would slide through so it could be lifted and carried on ones shoulders. On the top of the ark there were carved cherubs with their wings open and spread wide forming a type of throne. The Ark was said to be God's footstool in heaven. But when the Israelites made their way through the wilderness, the Ark was carried at the head of the crowd and understood as God himself on the throne of the cherub's wings, and that God marched *with* his people. Wherever the Ark was, there was God...fully present to them. At night it rested in the camp; holy as holy can be.

But now it makes its way to Jerusalem with King David, but just like Moses was not gifted with the experience of crossing the river Jordan to the Promised Land, nor was David to be the grand architect of the Temple that would eventually house the Ark. David's son, Solomon, is the chosen one to build the famous, glorious Temple around it. For hundreds of years the Ark will remain present in the Temple, but eventually it gets destroyed when the Chaldeans raze the temple and

the precious Ark disappears from history. But not without one last mention of it in the Bible. The Gospel writer, John, in prison on the island of Patmos, catches a vision of eternity. "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and earthquake, and heavy hail" (Revelation 11:19).

So that's the Ark's story in a nutshell. And now we can go back to David and analyze all the reasons why David felt like dancing, dancing like a fool for God. And why wouldn't he? He had won a giant victory, he was coming home, his enemies were strewn around, the Ark was recovered, and now making its way to Jerusalem. As mentioned, this symbol would unite a divided nation, calling all back to their common roots. The Ark literally made Jerusalem *the* City of David also commonly called the City of God. There was much to be rejoicing about!, and David danced, danced with all his might, naked, exposed, open, and vulnerable to all those who would despise him in their hearts, yet he danced, uninhibited he danced.

I feel this is what we're called to take away from Scripture today. We are being gifted with the question: "What does it mean for us to dance before the Lord?" When do we dance with God? Or are we more like David's wife, Michal, who peers out of a window, ashamed and embarrassed by her husband's foolishness; embarrassed when others show such vulnerability and such an outpouring of emotion in public. Michal clearly believed this was neither the time nor the place for such a display. Maybe we're not quite as rigid as she, but we have to admit, we are pretty stiff.

The writer for the ucc.org website asks these questions about David's enthusiasm for God in relation to our churches today: "Have we tamed the gospel? 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 almost immobile in our pews?

Henry Brinton has compared our "frozen chosen" worship, especially in Euro-American churches, to a modern dance solo by Paul Taylor, the dancer/choreographer who "simply stood motionless on stage for four minutes....The dancing we do in church tends to be quite similar to Paul Taylor's solo. What we do is nothing – we just stand still, hardly moving a muscle. Our

worship of God involves our minds, our hearts, and our tongues, but rarely our whole bodies" (*New Proclamation 2009*). This is especially noticeable in Protestant churches, where the offering plate and communion are brought to the people in the pews, presumably so that they won't need to move. Contrast that immobility with that of churches where the congregation comes forward to bring their offerings and to receive communion." These kinds of churches see themselves with the Spirit's eyes, eyes that tell the truth of our nature, that we are *receivers* first, and then we give. Most church traditions see themselves as givers, but in truth, we have in fact received *first*...received from God, received first the gift of breath and thus the gift of life. And we continue to receive, and it is in that receiving that we are called to give.

Honestly, on the merit of receiving alone wouldn't we want to be rejoicing!? There is nothing we can see or hear or taste or smell or feel that hasn't been given to us first. This is worth rejoicing over!

Recently I was blessed with an experience where I was reminded of my lack of joy for God; where I was reminded of how "Michal- like" I can be; where I was reminded of how little I have thanked God for so many many things! Two weeks ago Marsha, our Youth Director, several of our Youth, and their advisor Cindy and I attended Trinity UCC in south Chicago. Trinity is the largest UCC church in the nation, primarily Afro-centric in heritage, founded in 1961 with an initial 87 families. Today, Trinity UCC has more than 8,000 members, 70 ministries and three Sunday worship services. Trinity UCC is also the largest congregational contributor to Our Church's Wider Mission, the UCC's common purse for regional, national and international ministries.

From the moment we entered the parking lot we found ourselves to be thankful. I was thankful for having found a parking spot under a shade tree, and then to top it off there was only one more spot open which their parking attendant agreed to hold for our other vehicle not yet there. As I waited the attendant chatted with me thanking me for visiting them that day and insisted this not be my only visit with them. When our second vehicle arrived he opened the gate and welcomed the others, as did several other parking attendants as we made our way in toward the church.

Once inside we headed upstairs to assure a birds-eye view. The sanctuary is very theatre like seating probably a couple thousand people. We noticed when we arrived that the worship service from 7:30am was still happening, although coming

to a close. We arrived at 10:45am for an 11am service. There was really no discerning the end of that first service with the beginning of the second...there was prayer happening and then some music and singing and then eventually entered their 125 member choir processing toward the Altar, but again it was way past 11am—no real start time that was obvious to us. Once this choir broke into song there was so much movement from all around you would have thought you were attending a parade and that Jesus was upon every float. They never ceased to be shouting something that they were thankful for, whether in organized song, or impromptu praise. The colors they wore were colors of joy that were mesmerizing to the eye. More than ½ hour into the service Marsha recognized that the song they were currently singing was “finally” the Call To Worship—so much for the CTW to be the opening to a worship service.

At one point (who knows where in the service, we pretty much gave up trying to decide where we were in the order of worship) their pastor stood up to share pastoral care concerns in addition to those listed in the bulletin. People got out their pens and began jotting the names down that Rev. Ottis was mentioning so as to remember them in their prayers at home. Somewhere in the service Scripture was read—we all read Scripture in unison.

The Passing of the Peace just somehow showed up in the service, and all nine pastors left the Altar area not to be seen for some time, for the their peace passing went on for 25 minutes! Our group was approached by several people who were committed to taking care of their guests. Following that was the offering; it was ½ hour long with small-to-medium sized garbage cans with a UCC logo on it as their means of receiving the envelopes. They passed it three times. When finally there was nothing left to receive the ushers, dressed in all white, stood in their assigned section holding the containers upside down. Once every usher was finished, the choir, who had been continuously singing, now offered a very special praise song for the tithes they had received. I could hardly contain myself as I watched their choir director dancing like David as she directed her choir and thought of our own choir director Mari Jane, wondering what she would look like put in motion like that!

Their pastor settled things down after a 20 minute praise song to begin their prayer time and Altar Call. The prayer was endless because they prayed in thankfulness for simply *everything*. No one is allowed to move during prayer...we know this because our group had to leave 2.5 hours into the service with no sermon yet, because of multiple commitments we all had to other things, and as we departed we were asked to stop and pray...”there’s no moving during prayer.” (OK, so you

can guess I didn't mention I was a pastor.) After prayer more praising went on for the prayers they just prayed. And on and on it went. Dancing like David, fools for Christ.

Our group left all with the same emotion...thank God we *could* rejoice like that! Finally, a place where we are given permission to shout to the Lord or at least dance like David. And those same parking lot attendants thanked us again for being there (even though they knew we were leaving prematurely).

Now granted, our heritage is primarily of the Evangelical Reformed side here at St. Peter's. We have culturally never behaved this way in worship or really anywhere else (except perhaps at the Kiel Picnic ;). Yet, we *have* those emotions, we just don't show them. We have culturally been far more like Michal that we have been like David. But let us remember that God was pleased with David that day, pleased with David's gestures of thankfulness and shows of joy, and not pleased with Michal for scripture tells us a few verses later that she died barren, a sign to the Hebrews as God's judgment for her judgment of David.

So, we're left in tension...the tension of wanting to shout and rejoice coupled with our stoicism and immobility. But we have to show God that we are *not* the frozen chosen. Some of our current energy at St. Peter's has God confused with how much we really do love Him. (David had problems, all the members of Trinity have problems, but they know to dance before God in praise and rejoicing for all things, anyway!)

We have all it takes to alter any frozenness and say Yes to loving Him in word and deed here at the church. Is it uncomfortable and scary?...perhaps a little. We have not always been a people who shout out loud in gratitude so much as we've been a people who comfortably shout in the other direction. It's a daring decision to say we'll dance with God in joy, and choose to see each other and all our human relationships as God would have us see them. It's a daring gesture to act toward others as God would have us act. It's daring to live our life around *God's will* for us versus our own. No wonder it can seem safer to put that dance off until the "some other time" which never comes.

The very kind of crazy, tumultuous, crisis times which keep us from dancing with God, *gave* David the **occasion** and **motivation** for his dance. David did not wait until life was calm and peaceful. David did not wait until he could find some isolated and private place. David did not wait until Michal thought it was appropriate and fitting. David just danced.

We all came back from Trinity so inspired...we wanted to inspire you too. We asked these three questions of ourselves and we ask them of you:

How do you *feel* about your Faith?

How do you *express* how you feel about your Faith?

How do we give one another *permission to* feel our Faith?

We can all dance with God at any stage of our church life or at home. We can dance with God while riding in a car, sitting in a wheelchair, walking in the street. We can dance with God lying in our bed in the moments before sleep comes. We don't need a quiet hilltop or even an uninterrupted hour to be with God. At our desk, eating lunch, rushing the kids to school, no matter what the day brings, we can dance a bit with God. We can dance more than a few steps here and there, and more than a few words of praise or prayer here and there. This way God is assured we His people are not the frozen chosen, but a people who have melted the ice with our love for one another.

Let us pray:

Holy God, we surrender to You now our hearts and our will. We need you to help us believe that in Your will being done there is such great joy for us to receive.

Oh, God, we ask for Your blessing on us at St. Peter's. Gift us with Your peace that says "peace be with you." Gift us with more faith so that we can trust You with our healing and our growing. Gift us with loving You more and showing You that love in word and deed, as we speak with one another, as we worship with one another, and as we minister to Your world with one another.

Thank you God for always being perfect and pure and for always loving us amidst our fears and weaknesses as we seek to be Your Body of Christ. It *is* Your love that keeps us going. Help us rejoice and be glad in it! Amen. (Lord's Prayer)