
“Ain’t Seen Nothin’ Yet!”

A SERMON on 2nd Samuel 6:12-23 for the 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B¹
Preached 11 July 2021 by the Rev. Matthew Emery, Lead Minister
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Today I want to do something a little different from my ‘normal’ way of preaching. In this reading from 2nd Samuel, there’s quite a bit going on, with some missing background story and all, and so I want to make sure you really have a sense of it. So this morning I’m going to sort-of interweave the reading of the scripture with both teaching and sermon. Those of you who are at home or if you happen to have a Bible with you, you could follow along in the text if you wanted to, but—just so you know—I’m going to be starting and stopping quite a lot.

So, here goes:

*A reading from 2nd Samuel, the 6th chapter.
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, here we are with King David. David had just been anointed the King of all Israel. For the super-quick review of the history here, you may remember that after the Israelites got out of Egypt in the exodus, then when they finally settled in the Promised Land, God told them that they should not make a king, and so they did not have a king over them.

As time went on, they wanted a little more in the way of governance, and so they went into a period of having chief judges, people like Deborah and Gideon and Samuel.

More time went on, the people pushed again for having a king, and finally God told them, ‘ok, fine, you can have a king, but you’re going to regret it...’.

God chooses a man named Saul to be the first king. Saul ends up being a bit of a tragic figure, and in the end things don’t work out and God rejects him from being king over Israel. God chooses a new king, a young boy named David, but David would not become king until after Saul has died. The story in the pages right before this morning’s reading—the story, in fact, that some of us heard here last week in worship—brings us to that time, the time after Saul dies when David fully and truly becomes king.

King David is not the only star in our story today, though. Central to today’s passage is this thing referred to as the “ark of God”. Whether from Sunday school lessons or Indiana Jones movies, you may remember this ‘ark of the covenant’ as the very ornate object that the Israelites built during the Exodus, holding, among other things, the tablets of the law. This ark was seen as the place of God’s presence among the people, the place where the leaders went to hear the voice of God speak to them.

Now, by this point in the story, the ark has made its way around to a number of different places, not all of them good. Namely, the ark was captured a couple different times by the Philistines, the main military enemy. After it had been returned the final time, it just sat around off in some side village for many years. Finally, when David first became king, he attempted to have the ark brought up to his new capital, Jerusalem. But there was, shall we say..., a bit of an ...

¹ The Revised Common Lectionary appoints a slightly different selection of verses (2nd Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19)

“accident” in transit ... you know... the kind of accident that causes God to strike someone down dead. 🙏 Well, that’s the way the story tells it anyway.

So, David decided to stop having it brought up to Jerusalem, and it gets stored off in the house of this Obed-edom guy.

That’s where we begin today’s story, with the ark at Obed-edom’s house, and David getting word that, rather than striking someone down dead, Obed-edom’s household has become quite *blessed* because of the ark’s presence.

All right, now that you know all the back-story to today’s reading, let’s continue:

*So David went and brought up the ark of God
from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing;*

Now, imagine this, if you will. You’ve got David and his helpers, they’re parading this ark up to Jerusalem. Lot’s of rejoicing, probably music and trumpets and everything... like maybe it’s a marching band, or a boom-box parade, or some *pungmul* (풍물) drumming, or a New Orleans jazz band lettin’ all the saints come marching in... hard to tell, but a lot of rejoicing. You have to really get a sense of how important this was for them.

*and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces,
he sacrificed an ox and a fatling.*

So, imagine this parade, rejoicing, music, and then every six paces, WHOOOOMP, “There God, there’s an ox”, WHOOOOMP, “and a fatling”. Parade onward, six more paces, WHOOOOMP. Giving all up to the joy of this moment.

And then..., get this..., it says:

David danced before the Lord with all his might;

He was out there just making a good time of this all. Now realize that in the culture of that time, men of prominence, and much more the king of the nation, would not be seen dancing, making a fool of themselves. But for David, having the presence of God there with him, it was just like, ‘hey man, nothin’ could get better than this’. Party on, dude!

Oh, but wait, it gets better, as it says:

David was girded with a linen ephod.

Now... there is a little bit of debate among scholars about what exactly this means David was wearing. But it would seem quite possible that David was *only* wearing this thing referred to as a ‘linen ephod’. And an ephod was not exactly some generous flowing garment. No, rather it’s more along the lines of a pretty skimpy undergarment. Basically, you could imagine David out there dancing away in his tightey-whiteys, his Fruit of the Looms. Or, perhaps even something a little more open, so that as he jumped and jiggled about, there may have been... um... a little less being left to curiosity, if you know what I’m saying!

All of this is to say, that David was throwing caution to the wind in order to extravagantly rejoice in the presence of the Lord.

*So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord
with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.*

*As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David,
Michal daughter of Saul ...*

Now, who's Michal? Now, Michal was one of David's wives, actually his first wife from what we can tell, and as it said, she was the daughter of Saul—Saul being the former king of Israel, the one that God rejected in favor of David.

So the new king is married to the daughter of the rejected king.
We're getting into some daytime soap opera material here, I think.
Anyway,

*[Michal] looked out of the window,
and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord;
and she despised him in her heart.*

Hold on to that, we'll be coming back to Ms. Michal in a little bit.

*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.
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,
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.*

All right, so taking a step back from the story for a moment, I have a question for us here today. What would it take for us to really, truly dance before the presence of the Lord? How do we open ourselves to the joy that it is to simply be in God's presence, to be God's people?

Now, I want you to join with me in a little activity here for a minute...

Part of being open to the dance moves of God, to find that joy in God's presence, part of it is simply about recognition. So I want to invite you to *recognize*.

Hold up your hand.
And close it into a fist.
What organ of your body does that (sort-of) look like? (A heart)

So, let's start pumping our hearts.
<bmb bmb bmb bmb>

About 70, or so, pumps a minute... or whatever it is for you.

Each one of those pumps, each and every one, a gift from God... to you.

And [congregant name]'s pumps, a gift of God to me, as well.
(Not just [congregant name]... the rest of you too)

60 minutes in an hour: 4,200 gifts from God you've received this last hour.

But you know, that's not the only gift.
Not the only gift.

You know... you have the joy of the presence of your family.
So maybe add a few beats per minute for each of those family members.
And you have the joy of the gifts you've been able to offer someone
in teaching, or caring, or whatever ways you are presence for someone else.
So add a few more beats for each of those gifts that God has given you to give on to others.
And then maybe the gift of this church community,
and all of the other things.

And you start to get a pretty good beat here.
Sort of a dance beat, if you will.
Maybe if you go into a club, you might hear a <mmpss mmpss mmpss mmpss>
with that kind of beat.
Or you know, that's actually the same kind of beat as a polka!
"Roll out the barrel, we'll have a barrel of fun. Roll out the barrel..."

When we recognize all of the gifts that God has given us,
it is pretty hard to not hear the dance beat of God,
breaking into our lives and into our world

But I will say, though, that dancing is not the only thing we can do out of our joy and
thankfulness for all that God is and all that God does for us.

As we have heard in the story, dancing was not the only thing David was doing either. All
along the way, David was also returning thank offerings to the God who anointed him and called
him in to service. Every six paces, WHOOOMP, an ox and a fatling. Then, when he got the ark up
to Jerusalem, it tells us that he offered "burnt offerings" and "offerings of well-being" to God. And
offerings to the people too, distributing food to "the whole multitude of Israel".

And so, my friends, what are our thank offerings to God? Feeling that dance-beat pulse of
all we have received from God, what do we return? Do we give of our resources and pay our
offerings, just to fund a *budget*? Simply to pay our dues—as if this place where we stand in the
presence of God was like just any other organization we belong to, like the gym or the Rotary club?

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul once wrote that God "is able to accomplish abundantly
far more than all we can ask or imagine". What is our response, our offering, our thanks-giving to
that God?

All right, there is yet one more piece to today's story—I told you we'd be getting back to
some things—so let us return to it:

David returned to bless his household.

*But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David,
and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today,
uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids,
as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!"*

I told you we were getting back to our soap-opera star Michal...

*David said to Michal,
"It was before the Lord,
who chose me in place of your father and all his household,
to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord,
that I have danced before the Lord.
I will make myself yet more contemptible than this,
and I will be abased in my own eyes;
but by the maids of whom you have spoken,
by them I shall be held in honor."
And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.*

"I will make myself yet more contemptible than this." Ha! This is probably my favorite line from this whole story. It is as if David is saying to Michal, "well, if you think that display—that display of my joy and thanksgiving at being in the presence of God—if you think that was *bad*, then just wait, there's even more yet to come.

It also does show, though, that if and when we let ourselves get caught up in truly rejoicing in God and God's gifts and God's power, not everyone will share our joy. When we extravagantly pour out ourselves and our resources in thanks to God, not everyone will appreciate the offering. When we start sharing our food and our lives with others, even the whole multitude of all the peoples, not everyone will like our open hands. When we start dancing to the beat that God is placing in our lives—well, some may find it a bit 'contemptible'.

But that is the way of God and the witness of those who have gone before us, after all.

When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, some found it contemptible.

When David danced before the ark of the Lord, some found it contemptible.

When Jesus welcomed the sinners and outcasts and women to eat with him, when he challenged the authorities, yes, even when he gave himself to the violence of the empire (i.e., the cross) without a fight, some found it contemptible.

And then, of course, God raised him from the dead—contemptible!

Paul took it to the Gentiles—contemptible!

Martin Luther reclaimed God's grace from church hierarchy—contemptible!

Early Presbyterians insisted on opening up the church to more participatory and democratic leadership—contemptible!

Early Methodists got Christians out of their brains and into their hearts, strangely warmed by the Holy Spirit—contemptible!

Presbyterians and Methodists and Congregationalists in Canada dared to believe that they could do more, and be better, together than they could do and be apart—contemptible!

United Church folk dared to: invest in the formation of the nation's youth²... and challenge the dominance of capitalism³... and ordain women as ministers... and rearticulate the core beliefs of Christian faith in new times and contexts⁴... and invest in revival and evangelism and church growth... and use church finances for advocacy and social justice... and be the first Canadians to have their institution apologize for actions toward First Nations peoples... and officially declare that people of all sexual orientations were eligible to serve in ministry... and begin conversation and action on being anti-racist... and raise millions upon millions of dollars for critical aid and disaster relief efforts all around the world... and push the envelope on creation care and ecological concerns... and, and, and... Contemptible!

And a congregation in the historic heart of Surrey in the Clover Valley likewise dared to believe that unity was the path to greater witness and mission in this community... and repeatedly opened themselves to courageous questions about their future... and took a chance on engaging in intercultural ministry, not knowing where or to whom that would lead... and even now, today, in this very moment, is opening itself up yet again to a new age led by the Holy Spirit into new possibilities... Contemptible!

"I will make myself yet more contemptible than this," said King David. It is time, my friends, for all of us to give up any delusion that our best days are behind us. It is time, my friends, for us to follow the Spirit's lead into a dance with God, no matter who thinks us contemptible. It is time, my friends, for us to turn to ourselves, to turn to one another, to turn to all the world, and say "Think that was something? **Well, you ain't seen nothin' yet!!**"

*Blessing and honour, glory and power be unto our dancing and contemptible God,
now and forever. Amen.*

² The Canadian Girls In Training and Trail Rangers / TUXIS movements.

³ The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order

⁴ A Statement of Faith (1940), A New Creed (1968), A Song of Faith (2006); as well as the *New Curriculum* of the mid-20th-century.