

International Celebrate God Day  
Psalm 24, 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19

“David danced before the Lord with all his might”

What a strange scene for we Postmodern people living in 2018. It's like watching a documentary of ancient people from a distant land with radically different customs and religious practice than ourselves. It seems like a story from far, far away.

First there's the Ark of the Covenant. And no this is not a story including Indiana Jones and Nazis trying to loot the power of the Ark. This is the original, the real story. The Israelite people at this time understood the Ark, the large ornate box, carried on poles, to be the representation of God's presence among them. It's an icon....or even more, the physical manifestation of God's presence.

The Ark was with them in the wilderness journeys and was with them during the time of the judges, and then was carted off into captivity during the last Philistine invasion. During the reign of King Saul the Ark was returned to the Hebrews but King Saul demonstrated little interest in restoring the Ark to its rightful place among the people.

So, while the Ark languishes in Obed's household, Saul passes off the scene and as we learned last week, David is crowned King.

And this experience described in this passage is the culmination of David's inauguration as king and his recognition that God is the center of Hebrew life. David and the Elders decide to return the Ark to Jerusalem, crafting a special tent wherein it will reside, since this is the time before the Temple is constructed.

Now this day, is the day when the Ark is transported to Jerusalem. The people have waited long for this day, the Elders have waited for a King who is interested in the Ark, and King David is thrilled to celebrate God as the center of the Hebrew people. So for the Israelites, this is the greatest political combined with religious event we can imagine. We don't have anything in our culture with which to compare. Perhaps in our time it's like the greatest worship service you can ever imagine with a huge dinner on the grounds afterwards.

So right in the middle of all this, there's King David. Freshly crowned and inaugurated, welcomed by the people, and so excited about this holy day. His zeal for God gets the best of him and he turns from a decently and in order Presbyterian to a shoutin and dancing

Pentecostal. He's dressed in an ephod, what priests wore in that day, to symbolize the spiritual nature of this experience. And David "dances before the Lord with all his might." Two times in this short passage this statement is made...it must have been quite a spectacle to behold. We can hear the comments from the decent people in the crowd now, "What, is that the king? I've not really seen him close up but that looks like the king. Does he not know this is un-kingly behavior? Kings conduct themselves with a certain dignity and decorum." But I imagine, even as some of the crowd are looking down on David's spiritual fervor, there were some among them....probably led by the children first...who were drawn in. "Dad, can I dance with the king too? Mom, is it OK for me to join the dance?" And before either parent can answer, the child is off and running and joining King David in the dance. And then maybe it's the Dad, "Well honey, I'll just walk along with them here too to keep watch over the kids." And before you know it, many in the crowd are also caught up in the moment...dancing before the Lord with all their might.

That's the ancient scene before us...that's what this passage describes...people who are so caught up in the moment of celebrating God that they forget themselves.

They are swept up into something bigger, something more grand, something larger than their usual everyday lives. They know that today God is in their midst. What a great Sabbath experience.

Joy – pure joy, unrestrained, unbridled, flowing full and strong, those moments of unbridled bliss which sneak up on us from time to time. Joy.

As you know we are practicing Sabbath this summer, with worshipping being a major focus. Also, Worship is one of the Fort Hill Faith Practices.

Joy is one of the by-products of worship, it's not the focus of worship. Our purpose in being here is not so that we will experience joy – we are not spiritual joy-junkies. Instead, joy sometimes happen as a result of our worship. Worship, in its best sense, is not about us.

Soren Kierkegaard, that great theologian and philosopher of the enlightenment period gives us some help in understanding the purpose of worship. Worship is like going to a play. There in the theater are the actors on stage, the director and stage hands behind the scenes, and the audience. Kierkegaard said that we have mistakenly fallen into the belief that we are the audience, passively taking in the experience, the worship leaders

are the actors on the stage performing for us, and God is the director, behind the scenes guiding the worship leaders. Instead, a more accurate understanding of this worship metaphor says Kierkegaard is that we The actors are on the stage acting out the play – they are us – the worshippers. When we sing and pray and preach we are doing worship. The worship leaders are like the director of the play – giving cues and reminding the actors of their lines and generally keeping things moving. So then where is God? God is the audience. God is taking it all in, absorbing the worship of God’s children.

I like this analogy or metaphor because it reminds us that worship is our act of praise to God. In this analogy, we don’t come here to get something from God, we come here to give God our praise and thanks. I’m grateful to Soren Kierkegaard for correcting our tendency to be only consumers when we come here.

Allow me to say confessionally that I need to worship. In fact I need to worship God regularly; even weekly. Because I have found that when I don’t worship God regularly, I mistakenly grow to believe my life is all about me. I fall into consumeristic thinking, believing that even the church is there to make me happy.

But I also want to offer a metaphor for worship that captures some other dimensions of worship. This morning I’m inviting us to consider worship in another way. Worship is like a homecoming – a homecoming. Worship is when people who haven’t seen each other for a while gather back home to be with each other and with the host. In this metaphor, God is the host. You can visualize God as host in several ways. God is the Forgiving Father from the prodigal son story – running down the driveway to greet and embrace the long lost son. Or God is the welcoming mother in the kitchen, with an apron on and flour in her hair, with delicious smells coming from that wonderful kitchen where she cooks up delightful meals for this gang. You can picture God in many ways in this metaphor, yet one thing for sure, God is the host welcoming us in.

The part I’m not so sure about is who we are. For we come to worship in many different ways, depending on the circumstances of our lives.

We have been out in the world and it’s been like a battlefield. We’ve had conflict at work with coworkers and the boss and we feel just beat up. We’ve taken the car to the shop and they fixed it, but it really wasn’t fixed and we are having to go round and round with them.

We've had someone work on the house and the work wasn't completed and now we can't get them back to the house to finish the job. We've neglected to do what our parents asked and now we are on restriction and we are bored to death sitting at home. We've had family conflicts that make us so mad we could chew the head off a nail. Sometimes when we come to worship, we are like veterans returning from foreign wars – we are all beat up by life. We are ready for someone to love on us for a while.

Sometimes it's even worse. Sometimes when we come to worship, it's like we are being wheeled through those doors on a hospital gurney. Sometimes we are more than beat up by life – sometimes we are just barely breathing.

Worship is like that. Worship has a way of pulling aside our masks, our veneers, our walls, and stripping us down to who we are. I've talked with many people who have lost a spouse or another family member and coming back to worship is one of the hardest parts of their grieving...for in worship the music, and the praying, and the preaching are the closest thing to a spiritual homecoming we have in this life...and worship sometimes is very personal and close.

We come to this holy homecoming in so many ways. Sometimes we are the prodigal daughter or son and we don't even know it. When we enter into worship God confronts us with our egoism and we find ourselves repenting. God finds ways to confront our pride when we enter into true worship. Other times we are celebrating when we come here. We've had a victory and a success and we come through these doors with spontaneous thanksgiving and praise for the one who gives every good gift. Sometimes we can barely get ourselves here and we need someone to love on us.

And now we are arriving at the good news. We don't have an Ark of the Covenant. But we have something, someone, far better, Jesus the Christ. Jesus Christ comes into this wider world as it is, and Jesus Christ advents into your world as it is. You don't have to get life in order first, you don't have to escape the chaos first...no the message of this Christian narrative is that from the very beginning Jesus Christ came into the world just as it is and now Jesus Christ comes into your world just as it is. This is the good news of the gospel...Jesus Christ comes to us, just as we are.

And when we are there, when we join the Lord our God there, and we lift our voices in song and praise and prayer and we focus in on God's revelation of love in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...then sometimes, we find ourselves right there with our brother David...dancing with all our might before the Lord. So, brothers and sisters in Christ, let's do this, let's dance.

Through the grace and love and power of Jesus Christ our Lord, may it become so. Amen