

“With dancing and music the Ark is brought into Jerusalem”

Sermon notes by the Rev. Arnold A. Bush, supply priest, at Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, Tallassee, AL, 7.15.12, Proper 10B

Text: 2 Samuel 6:1-5; 12b-19, David brings Ark into Jerusalem

Introduction: A city celebrates with much excitement

Who remembers seeing the movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* starring Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones?

Imagine it is 2013, and two events in Tallassee have been causes for great celebrations. Tallassee High School has just brought home the 5-A state football championship trophy, and the Chamber of Commerce has announced a new industry that will add hundreds of new jobs, and which will be locating in the Industrial Park on Highway 229 South. Bands are marching down Gilmer Avenue, and thousands are out to celebrate these events. Thousands of people have watched the parade, and most have walked to the stadium for a pep rally. The trophy is brought up to the 50 yard line with all the team players marching in cadence to the dance music. The dance band is playing on the field, and hundreds of couples are in one end zone dancing as the Blue Angels fly over that night. It is the biggest celebration ever in Elmore County. There is a ring of joy, dancing in the streets, and people hugging each other. The thousands in the stadium are singing to the top of their lungs.

Not only has Tallassee had a big year, but other Alabama teams have also had a big year for championships. The Biscuits of Montgomery have just won their league championship. Auburn has just won the final four in basketball; University of Alabama has won the College World Series in Omaha. Now imagine you are in New Orleans in the first week in February, and the Super Bowl Game is being played in the New Orleans Super Dome. The Saints have made it to the Super Bowl twice and each time they have won! In your mind picture the emotional celebrations on Canal and Bourbon Streets. Fans are filled with excitement and dancing in the streets.

In the Old Testament lesson we just heard about a big city-wide celebration in the City of Jerusalem during the reign of King David. Lots of dancing! In the Old Testament lesson there is the DANCE OF LIFE; in the Gospel lesson, there is a DANCE OF DEATH (John the Baptist). I hope the images of high school, college, and professional sports championships have triggered some stories in your minds. Maybe you have some memories of citywide celebrations such as these. Zoe and I lived in San Antonio 5 years and participated in an area-wide Fiesta in the latter part of April each year.

II Sam. 6:5 *David gathered some 30,000 men to bring the Ark of God into the City. "David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with songs, and with harp, lyres, tambourines, and sistrums and cymbals."*

V 16, *"As the Ark was being brought into the city, the daughter of Saul, watched from her window. And when she saw the King leaping and dancing before the Lord, she despised him in her heart."* Hebrew has five different motions describing the excitement of David.

The Bringing of the Ark of the Covenant in the city was a very big celebration in Jerusalem. In the Old Testament lesson today we have a description of King David bringing the Ark of the Covenant into to the Walled City of Jerusalem.

The first chapters of II Samuel deal the conflict between the House of Saul and the House of David. David is anointed King by the leaders of the Twelve Tribes. The previous chapter covers his success as a General of the Armies over the Philistines. The writer of II Samuel gives only a few column inches covering the political victory over Jerusalem and in the lesson today, he covers in detail the religious issues in Jerusalem.

II What do we need to know about the Ark of the Covenant?

In these sections covering the history of the Hebrew people, scholars have identified four sources or four editors in composing this history. Each editor wrote in a certain century with a particular theological perspective. It is called the **Ark of Yahweh** (God), **Ark of the Covenant**, and **Ark of the Testimony**. The literal word used in the vulgate was a "chest" or a receptacle a cubit and a half. A cubit is 18 inches; thus, it is about 47 inches long. Each editor would describe it and its contents in a different way. It is said to contain the Decalogue on tablets or stones from Mt. Sinai and sacred writings.

My resource *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 1962*, states there were four general interpretations with each interpretation found in all the major representations. Here are the FOUR INTERPRETATIONS:

1. The Ark is the **extension or embodiment** of the presence of Yahweh. (I Sam. 6:3;5;8;20). This was not an actual identification but an extension of Yahweh.
2. In Samuel 4 the Ark is a War Pal-la-di-um (a **protective white metal before the monarchy**)
3. In Kings 8:21 and II Chronicles 6:11, It is a **container**, a fetish stone from a sacred place in little Sinai. Two tablets of the Decalogue.
4. A portable **throne** for the invisible presence of Yahweh.

In our worship, an example is the Real Presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine. Epiphany has a Tabernacle to contain the reserved sacrament. Most Anglicans state they believe in the Real Presence but do not attempt to explain how this happens.

As you study the History of the Hebrew People Escaping Egypt, the Ark is associated with the **portable Tent, or Tabernacle**, carried in the Camp as they move. As they moved about the desert for 40 years (Numbers 14:42), the Ark stayed within the Camp.

In the 3rd and 4th chapters of the Book of Joshua, there is an elaborate description of Israel crossing the Jordan River at Gilgal to enter the Promised Land. The Ark was carried by several men and placed in **the middle the river**. The current was stopped up stream as the Israelites crossed the Jordan River. It was also carried **around the walls of Jericho** as the armies marched around the city. (Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, which is located in the Jordan River Valley just north of the Dead Sea)

The period of the Judges was **a period of obscurity**. During the battles with the Philistines, the Israelites were defeated by the Philistines but attributed their defeat to the absence of the Ark. It is interesting to note that the attending Philistine priests said, *“The gods have come into the camp; who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods.”*

Ark under Philistine Control

In subsequent battles, the Philistines captured the Ark again. While the Ark was sojourning in the Philistine cities, it **brought desolation with the bubonic plague** (I Samuel 6:5). With this devastation of the plague, the Philistines were smart to arrange the return of the Ark to Israel. The religious interpretation of the Ark in Philistine hands stated that **Yahweh alone could overcome the Philistines**. Yahweh compelled them to return the Ark to Israel. Yahweh was capable of saving Himself and gaining his liberty.

For some 20 years during the Reign of King Saul, the Ark is not mentioned.

David brings the Ark to Jerusalem, Text II Sam.6:1-5; 12-19

In the Old Testament text, II Samuel 6:1-5; 12-19, here is the sequence of events:

1. David gathers 30,000 men to set out to move the Ark from the house of A-bin-a-dab in Baalah of Judah. This house was on a hill.
2. They set it on a new cart, not the long poles as with the original Ark.
3. A-bin-a-dab's two sons, UZZAH and A-HI-O were in front of the Ark. David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with songs, lyres, tambourines, and cymbals.

4. As they approach the hard threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the Ark, because the oxen had stumbled. In this irreverent act, the Lord's anger struck him down, and he died beside the Ark.
5. David was angry because the Lord's wrath had broken out. So he redirected the Ark not to go into Jerusalem, but to the House of Obed-Edom, the Gittite. During this three month sojourn, the Lord blessed the house of Obed-Edom.
6. Listen to David's leadership: So David went to Obed-Edom's house where he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. So David took six steps, and nothing happened. Would he be struck down by Yahweh ?
7. In I Chronicles 15, David had ignored the stipulations that the Ark was to be carried by poles and only a priest could touch it. So David was wearing a priestly garment a linen ephod, a very thin piece of cloth.
8. So the Ark is brought into the City, and Saul's daughter watches from the window. She is appalled by David's dancing and lack of clothing.
9. He places the Ark inside of the tent and makes sacrifices. Then he gives to the crowd the cakes of raisins and dates. The crowd eats the cakes and then they return to their homes. David said he will celebrate before the Lord. (Every celebration needs food to be served). For Americans at celebrations, there is singing, raising and clapping of hands. In church, there is bowing and making the sign of the cross. These are **GESTURES IN WORSHIP, MOVEMENT, OR DANCING.**
10. Michal is watching from the window, only as a spectator and not a participant. She begins complaining about David's display of disrobing before slave girls and acting so undignified. Michal had no children to the day of her death.
11. Later King Solomon moved the Ark in Zion into the Holy of Holies in the inner sanctuary of the Temple. (I Kings 8). Josiah restored it I Kings 35:3.
12. When Neb-u-cha-dezzar invaded Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E., it may have been destroyed or stolen. **"The fate of the Ark is a bigger mystery than its origin."** **The history of the ARK after 587 B.C.E. creates a lot of space for movies and novels, so go ask Harrison Ford or the script writers of *Raiders of the Lost Ark.***

III From this story of David and the Ark,

What can we do? How can we apply some of the insights?

1. The Ark was a symbol of unity for the 12 **tribes** when placed in the religious ceremonies within the capitol city of Jerusalem. David placed Israel's primary Symbol in the center of their life. We need a symbol that unites us.

- A. **The Archives in Washington, D.C.** houses the original copies of the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the U.S. Constitution. These documents unite us. Suppose the Declaration of Independence were in a museum in Philadelphia or the Bill of Rights and Constitution in Monticello on a farm road just north of Charlottesville, Virginia? These documents that unite us are in our nation's capital where we can see and appreciate them in one place. Although they were written in different places, after decades, they are written in the hearts of American citizens.
- B. **American Flag.** Two summers ago while at our family condo in Pensacola, Zoe and I attended a changing of Command located inside the Naval Museum at NAS Pensacola. Commander of Corry Station, Connie Fezzell (wife of the former Priest of St. John's, Pensacola) received orders be on the staff at the Pentagon in Washington. Is the Presentation of the Colors just a flag? Some who are not paying attention are showing Disrespect. The American flags are first an extension of the Marines, Coast Guard, Navy Personnel, other branches of the military, all citizens. and then the American Flag. Carrying the American Flag, saluting and placing our hands over our hearts are outward and visible signs of our loyalty to our Constitution and Bill of Rights.
- C. **Altar and Chalice:** in the Church of the Epiphany we reverence the Altar, the symbol of God's presence where the sacred elements are blessed. We bow or genuflect to show respect and honor. Couples bow before an Altar for the Nuptial Blessing; we stand or kneel before the Altar to receive His sacramental presence. God is not contained in the Altar or elements, but active in our hearts and the world. We place our concerns and thanksgiving on the Altar. (An example in Tifton, Georgia is where beer cans with \$300.00 in coins were placed on the Altar in open church).
- D. What unites us in the Episcopal Church? Certainly the Living Christ, but maybe the Presiding Bishop, Katherine. She was in our diocese for the Investiture of Bishop Sloane last January.
2. **David's extreme emotions are expressed in his dancing, leaping, There are 5 words in Hebrew for emotions. JOKE:** One Sunday, a gentleman was sitting in the 4th pew on the right. He was clapping, singing at the top of voice, raising his hands, shouting *Amens and Halleluiahs*, etc. The usher came down and said, "Sir, we are glad you are here, but could you be less expressive?" "I got religion last month." "Yes I know, but you did not get it here."

- A. Michal said David's dancing while wearing only an ephod was giving out sexual connotations of adultery. She is the criticizing spectator and not an engaged participant.
- B. In churches a tension can occur between being stuck with using only old, traditional liturgies on the one hand and on the other hand, the use of more contemporary gestures and music. There is always this tension between the old familiar and the new changes, and in some protestant churches they are called "Worship Wars." Older priests like me are sometimes too quick to judge newer forms of worship in the Book of Common Prayer. Our Supplemental Hymnals were used in the 1990s with a lot of folks saying to Rector Doug Carpenter, "Keep that Camp McDowell music out of our church." Joke: One Sunday the rector had a praise band with drums, guitars, and a praise quartet while having the congregations clap to the beat. One of the older ladies was walking out of the church and said, "*Jesus would be ashamed of this; why he would turn over in his grave.*"
- C. King David brought his religious convictions, by bringing the Ark into the City of Jerusalem. He wanted to build his Kingdom of Judah on the Ten Commandments and bring Yahweh's love of his people into the political and military arena of the culture. We have a wonderful democracy where there is a **separation of Church and State** in the First Article of the Bill of Rights but as Christians, we must merge our Christian values into the political and secular ethics and morals.
- D. If David can dance before this very sacred symbol as it is being brought into the Tent in Jerusalem, then maybe you and I should be a little **more emotionally expressive** as we worship and pray. Stand up or kneel to pray, use objects to remind us of Christ as we walk; the only way is close every eye and bow every head. In reading Diane Butler Ross's new book, *Christianity After the Religion, The End of the Church as we Know it, and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*, I saw many parallels in David's behavior on this day. Professor Ross states there are four important actions in growing one's faith: *prepare, practice, play and participate*. In a way King David was preparing his kingdom with a unifying symbol, playing with the crowd in dancing and participating in welcoming Yahweh into the Capital. Another example in my journey: Standing in a sophisticated posture as an Episcopal Priest in my 20s and trying to imitate the rector of my teen years. Episcopal clergy always dressed properly, went to the concerts, the opera, and the symphony. They

did not enjoy football games, sports, cheering at camp, and acting a little crazy. Why Mrs. Jones in my home parish would be embarrassed by my expressions.

- E. In a comparison on a scale of 1 through 10 and **One** is lacking in expression and **Ten** is dancing down the Aisle, **where are you?** Examples: 6 teens making movement with streamers on long poles for procession; standing up and shouting, "Thank you Jesus;" Applause at end of dismissal, "Give God a hand;" Sing a little louder and more joyfully; I welcome the musical instruments in worship while worshipping in St. Stephen's. There is no organ, but I have seen trumpets, harps, guitars, string quartets, drums, tambourines, cymbals, and bells all praising God! David danced with all his strength to the Lord. Let us not sit on our emotions but express our joy to the Lord.

Lastly, David placed the Ark in the TENT, not the Temple...Solomon built the Temple. Are Christians more of a TENT People or a Temple people? We are pilgrim people, always on a journey, going to heaven, our final resting place. Christ is our companion. He travels with us.

Temple People have arrived; they are too comfortable, resting, and stagnant. God is only in the Temple; He is not the Temple.

Review: Try some of these new behaviors. Remember King David.

For those reading this on the Webpage, Google "Ark of the Covenant," and you will find lots of theories and articles about its location.