



New Day Church

Need a fresh start?

GOD ON THE MOVE

*Jeff Peabody
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That National Spelling Bee took place this week. It always makes me think of Lara Williams, who beat me 2 years in a row – fifth AND sixth grade -- in our school district spelling bee. It didn't mean she was smarter than me, okay? It just meant I didn't advance any further.

These kids in the national bee are hard core spellers, spending hours every day going through dictionaries. Round after round, the number of contestants whittled down from hundreds until there were just two girls left, one from Canada and one from New Jersey. Finally, the Canadian girl hit a word she didn't know and made a mistake, so she was out. The other girl, Kerry Close, had to spell one final championship word correctly for the title to be hers.

The judge read the word: URSPRACHE.

Yikes. I don't think even Lara Williams would have gotten that one right. But if you saw it on TV, you saw Kerry's eyes light up. You could just tell she knew the word, and she nailed it without hesitation. Afterwards, when she was asked what was the best moment of the competition, she said, "Probably hearing ursprache." She savored getting a word she knew well.

If somebody were to mention to me 2 Samuel 6, I think my eyes would light up like Kerry's did. That's our text for this morning. I know it well, and I am savoring this chance to talk about it. I'm not trying to say I'm an expert on the passage by any means, but it's one that has been a touchstone for me over the years, and I'm happy that it falls in David's life so that we can discuss it this morning.

We've covered a number of moments in David's remarkable journey over the last several weeks. As you may have noticed by now, the Bible devotes a lot of space to him. He's a larger than life character, but he also feels extremely relatable because we're shown his struggles and imperfections in addition to his great accomplishments. We saw that last week when his fears led him to lie and act crazy. Suddenly this giant-killing hero seemed very much like the rest of us, finding his way through the bewilderment.

He spent a number of years in that state, always on the run from Saul, learning to find refuge in God. You can read some of those adventures for yourself in the last chapters of 1 Samuel and the first chapters of 2 Samuel. This morning we're jumping ahead a few years. Fast forward to a new stage in his life. King Saul and his son Jonathan have died in battle. David has now been officially crowned king. And he's beginning to make some changes.

It's been interesting over the last few weeks at my day job to be interviewing people to take my place as I transition out. Kind of an unusual spot to be in. We've interviewed a variety of candidates who are all very individual. What's clear is that whoever ends up in the job is going to do things differently than I did, even if they have similar skills. There will be a regime change. New processes will be put in place because that person will have unique strengths and their own personality and their own way of doing things.

When David came to power, he was not going to run the country the same way Saul did. He was going to put his own stamp on the kingdom. As we've said before, David had a heart for God that Saul didn't have, and that shaped his approach to ruling. It affected his whole life. One of his first priorities as king was to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem.

Last week, we talked a little bit about the Tabernacle, or the "Tent of Meeting" as it was called – the tent the Israelites took with them through the desert that was like a traveling temple. Normally, in the center of the Tabernacle was the ark of the covenant.

If you remember other Bible stories or the Indiana Jones movies, you may recall that the ark of the covenant was a gold covered box that was about 4 feet long by 2 feet wide. On top of it were two angel like creatures called cherubim. Between their wings was a place called the mercy seat. It was in that place that God's glory would rest. The Bible sometimes called it God's footstool. God didn't live in the box – he's everywhere. But the ark of the covenant was one place where his glory could be seen in a tangible way. It was the focal point of Jewish worship.

Now about 30 years before David became king, during another fight with the Philistines, the ark of the covenant was stolen by the Philistines because they thought it would bring them luck. Turns out it didn't – God struck them with a plague instead. So the Philistines said "Get this thing out of here!" and sent the ark back to Israel.

But for some reason the ark never quite made it back to be reunited with the tabernacle. Instead, it was parked 10 or 15 miles away in the garage at Abinadab's house for 30 years, with one of his sons guarding it. King Saul never saw a reason to move it.

When David has the authority to do something about it, he says, "This isn't right. The ark should be in the tabernacle." So he sets out to get it. And that's what our story is about today. How's it going with BYOB? If you're following along, this morning I'll be reading from the NIV version, with a few verses from The Message version.

2 Samuel 6

David again brought together out of Israel chosen men, thirty thousand in all. He and all his men set out from Baalah of Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark.

They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals.

When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God.

Then David was angry because the LORD's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah.

David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, "How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?" He was not willing to take the ark of the LORD to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it aside to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the LORD blessed him and his entire household.

Now King David was told, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God." So David went down and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart.

They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD. After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD Almighty. Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes.

When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!"

David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD's people Israel -- I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor."

And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.

So why do I like this story so much? What about this strange little sequence matters for us today? I think the bottom line is that this story is about much more than transporting an artifact. It's not about a box. It's all about worship.

Here at New Day, we've identified seven core values that define what we want to be as a church. At the top of the list is this one: Worship is central. We believe that honoring God is our primary mission.

There are a lot of other good things that churches do: Helping the poor, telling people about Jesus, supporting each other through hard times. Those are all great. But there's only one activity we do here that we will keep doing in heaven, and that's worship God. That's the basic purpose of us as a group and each of us as individuals. God wired us to love and respond to him.

Our worship looks much different than David's. We don't still have an ark. There's no tabernacle. We don't wear special clothes and dance in the street with tambourines. But if you can look past all those trappings, there are some basic truths about worship in this story that speak directly to us today.

Worship is a big word that can mean many things. We talk about singing and praying as worship. David's dancing was an expression of his worship. But I think the real act of worship in this story was going to get the ark itself.

The ark was in Israel's possession. It was no longer being held by the Philistines. But the ark wasn't a key player any more. Nothing Israel did revolved around it. David had the desire to move it from the sidelines to the center, right to Jerusalem, the very seat of power.

And that's about the most concrete, acted out definition of worship you could find: **moving God to the center of your life.** We constantly leave God on the sidelines. We might give him lip service. We might even sing all the songs on Sunday. But if he's not at the seat of power in our hearts, we're not worshipping.

Eugene Peterson defines worship this way: *“Worship is the strategy by which we interrupt our preoccupation with ourselves and attend to the presence of God.”*

That’s why we say that the way we live can be an act of worship. Anytime we interrupt our preoccupation with ourselves and attend to the presence of God, we are worshipping. And anytime we go through the motions of worship without that interruption, we’re not truly worshipping.

When I was leading worship at our old church, one of my responsibilities was to schedule soloists to sing in the service, and I would sometimes schedule them to sing while the offering plate was being passed. One woman was very angered by that, and she said she felt it wasn’t honoring to the musicians to sing when people were distracted by the plate being passed. She should visit here sometime. If someone wanted to sing for the offering, they’d have to go stand by the mailbox.

She was right – it wasn’t honoring the musicians. But it wasn’t SUPPOSED to be about honoring the musicians. The point was to honor God. Singing or playing music in church can’t be about you and God at the same time.

The same thing is true with praying. People are always intimidated by praying out loud. Prayer can become more an attempt to impress other people than a true act of worship. Listen to what Jesus said (taken from *The Message*):

Matthew 6:5

And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat?

When it comes to money, some people think the goal is to give a certain percentage that will satisfy God. But worshipping God with your money goes far deeper than that. It’s about moving God to the center of all your financial decisions, choosing to interrupt the preoccupation with yourself and attend to God.

The same is true with your time. The same is true with your relationships. The same is true with your job. The same is true with whatever you do everyday. All of life can become an act of worship when we ask what David asked: “How can we move God to the center, where decisions are made and priorities are set?”

When David decided it was time, he went at it full force. Look again at those first verses we read:

David again brought together out of Israel chosen men, thirty thousand in all. He and all his men set out from Baalah of Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark.

Don't you love the way the author shows his reverence for God in the way he describes the ark? "The ark of God, which is called by the name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark." It's perfect.

David takes 30,000 troops to Baalah to make this happen. Imagine just slightly more than all the active troops stationed at Fort Lewis. It was a HUGE undertaking. That may have been overkill, but remember, the ark has been stolen by an army before. The point is that David wasn't casual about this effort at all. That's because worship is

Intentional, not random

The ark didn't move by itself to Jerusalem. Abinidab didn't decide to clean his garage out one day and bring it into town and drop it off. The move took desire and work on David's part. Otherwise, it wouldn't have happened.

There's a church in Miami called The Church of St. Bernard de Clairveaux. It used to be a monastery and it was built nearly 1,000 years ago. But it wasn't built in Miami – it was built in a small town in Spain. It's something completely out of its place. The multimillionaire William Randolph Hearst saw it in Spain and decided to buy it. He had the entire thing disassembled and shipped to the U.S. in 11,000 carefully marked boxes. The story got more interesting when the boxes reached the U.S. and got held up in customs. Everything was unpacked and repacked, but in the wrong boxes. It wasn't until nearly 30 years later, after Hearst had died that the church was rebuilt in Miami. It's a monument to commitment and intentional effort.

That's how worship is –it has to be undertaken very intentionally, because all kinds of distractions will try to prevent it from happening. Kind of like me and my exercise plan. I've been saying for months that I need to start doing some cardio. I've got some really good ideas of things I could do. But I haven't done anything. I've thought about it a lot and talked about it. I wish I was in shape. But all the wishing in the world won't help get it done.

We can say we'd like to worship God and wish we were more in tune with him. Someday we'll spend more time reading our Bible. Someday we'll start to pray sometime other than before a meal. Until we make it enough of a priority to change our actions, it's not going to happen on its own. Putting God in the center of our marriage or our family or our workplace or our friendships isn't going to happen magically. That's why Peter wrote,

1 Peter 3:15

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.

Setting apart Christ in our hearts takes work. It's disruptive to our routine. There's not always very much room in my heart to set space aside for him. It takes us out of what feels comfortable and natural. We'd almost rather have God just be somewhere in the general vicinity than go to the bother of inviting him into the center of our world. David

would tell us we have to make that conscious decision to make him a priority. Worship is intentional – not random.

For all his good intentions, though, things didn't go so well. Everybody was extremely enthusiastic and having a good time when an oxen suddenly tripped. The cart began to lean and the ark started to slide. So Uzzah instinctively did what anyone would do – he reached out to steady the ark. And for his effort, God struck him down.

For some reason, what he did made God really angry. And that made David angry. Didn't God see they were trying to do a good thing? What was the point in doing this if people were going to die?

But as David thought about it further and began to investigate what had happened, he discovered some of the reasons why God was so upset. I would boil it all down to say that he realized worship is

Fear of God, not fear for God

The ark of the covenant was considered holy, and it was not supposed to be touched. It had 4 rings on the bottom that poles could be slipped through for carrying it – a system that allowed it to be transported without touching it, and at the same time had a built-in safeguard so it couldn't fall. Only the priests called Levites were allowed to even carry the poles.

David and his troops had ignored these rules about the ark. He realized it. This story is also told in 1 Chronicles. After his investigation, David says to the priests,

1 Chronicles 15:13

It was because you, the Levites, did not bring it up the first time that the LORD our God broke out in anger against us. We did not inquire of him about how to do it in the prescribed way.

They put it on a cart, maybe thinking it would be a faster mode of transportation. Uzzah didn't hesitate to touch something that was sacred. One thing after another happened that indicated the Israelites were saying they wanted to worship God while at the same time they weren't respecting his instructions. In other words, they showed no fear of him, but they were afraid for him when the cart tipped.

God does not need our protection. We do not need to worry about him. But sometimes we think that's our job. A couple weeks ago we had our discussion group about the DaVinci Code. As I was preparing for the class, I spoke with a lot of people about it, and I read a lot of material online. Some people loved the book. Some people were angry about the way it presented fiction as fact. Some people were confused by it. But some of the responses that I read online from Christians sounded more like fear than anything else and seemed to suggest we somehow needed to protect God from being threatened by this book.

Listen – God does not need us to defend him. He is not a fragile vase. He is truth and power. He is the Almighty who sits enthroned between the cherubim. He takes care of himself, and he’s certainly not threatened by a novel.

We have ways of doing that all the time, fearing people’s actions or words will damage God. We don’t say it that way, but that’s what it is. It’s not that we shouldn’t address error and point out when blatant untruths are being thrown around as if they’re legitimate. We need to. But we often react to things in the name of respect for God, when it really isn’t motivated by respect at all. It is a deep seated fear that he won’t survive without our intervention. We don’t trust in his strength. We don’t think he can withstand the scrutiny. We step in and try to fix situations or people and play God ourselves. He becomes less powerful and we become more so, because we become the guardians of all that’s true and right.

Again, I quote Eugene Peterson. He says:

Holy Scripture posts Uzzah as a danger sign for us: “Beware the God.” It’s especially important to have such a sign posted in places designated for religious worship and learning... We begin by finding in God a way to live rightly and well, and then along the way we take over God’s work for him and take charge of making sure others live rightly and well. We get the idea that we’re important, self important, because we’re around the Important. Religion is a breeding ground for this kind of thing.

We try to take on God’s role, but he says no. Instead God says we should be concentrating on what he has shown us demonstrates real respect for him. Jesus said,

John 14:15

If you love me, you will obey what I command.

A focus on obedience to God is where worship begins, showing mercy and justice to others – not trying to somehow manage and protect God’s status for him.

David learns his lesson. He goes back a second time and this time does things by the book. No more ox cart – the Levites take the job themselves. And David pours his heart and soul into celebrating before God. In fact, he was so into it that it embarrassed his wife.

As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart.

David was making a total fool of himself. He completely lost the respect of this woman because it was so unsightly. Apparently David wasn’t that impressive of a dancer.

But David is on this total high from the experience. The ark is back, it's been a great day of joy, and he gets home and runs into this:

When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!"

It really bothered her. It was too extreme. If David wanted to worship God on a little more mild scale, that would have been fine. But this just seemed over the top.

David sets her straight:

David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD's people Israel -- I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor."

David's final lesson on worship for us is that it is about **relationship – not ritual**.

What motivated David was the fact that he knew God had chosen him. He had a relationship with him. Everything he did was a response to that. He wasn't just jumping through hoops because that's what the Bible said to do. He wasn't trying to please God by following all the rules. He was following the rules and dancing with all his might because this God was his God. There was a connection there that was personal that inspired his worship.

When Karin was around 4 years old, her dad had been away from the family for awhile, serving as the interim pastor at a small church in Northern Minnesota. Karin's mom took her and her younger brother to go hear him preach one Sunday. They arrived late at the little church. It was the classic church sanctuary from that era – two rows of pews, with a center aisle leading from the back of the church all the way up to the platform and the pulpit.

As I said, Karin and her family arrived late. Her dad was already up preaching. As soon as Karin saw him up front, she yelled "Daddy!" and ran straight up the aisle. In the middle of her stride, she looked over and happened to see an elderly woman giving her the worst glare ever, because she was breaking two cardinal rules: You never run in church, and you never interrupt a sermon. But Karin didn't care. She missed her dad and he was right there, and she knew he would be happy to see her too.

And he was. He gave a good laugh when he saw what was happening, scooped her up in his arms and hugged her. Then he introduced the family to the congregation and went on from there.

That's relationship at work. That's how our worship should be – us running toward our heavenly father with unstoppable joy, knowing he's good, knowing he loves us, knowing he's always happy to see us. Who cares what other people may think? What does it matter how people react if I close my eyes or raise my hands or sing off key or clap too loudly? We're not performing for anybody. Our worship is between us and God.

Are we willing to look foolish for God? Do we love him enough to do things that other people won't understand? I've known people who have turned down great financial opportunities, sacrificing the money for their relationship with God. Other people have broken off relationships or stayed in tough relationships out of love for God. All of life can become worship as we abandon our pride and run toward our father.

In a moment, we'll be taking part in the Lord's Supper, the time when we remember what Jesus did for us to make that relationship with him possible. It's a great opportunity for us to interrupt the preoccupation with ourselves and attend to God's presence with us. As you take some time to reflect, here are some questions for you:

1. Is God on the fringe for me? It's great if he's in your life. How central is he? Are there areas where he's not at the seat of power? Is there some place where you've been keeping him on the sidelines?

Maybe you believe there's a God but you don't feel like you have a personal connection with him at all. Jesus says it's as simple as inviting him in. When we say, "Lord I need you. I need your forgiveness. I believe you died for me. Please come into my life and turn me around," he'll answer that prayer immediately. He'll begin something new in your heart. He'll give you his Spirit and open up your heart to worship him on a whole new level. You can pray that today. And he will never leave you.

2. What step can I take to be more intentional in my worship? Worship is about moving God to the center, restoring him to his rightful place in our lives. What specific changes could he be asking you to make this morning?

We serve a big God who doesn't need our protection, but who wants our hearts, who wants to be in the middle of all we do.