

David dances before the Lord

2 Samuel 6:1-19

I don't often preach on the Old Testament reading of a Sunday, but today I make an exception, because, buried within this reading is a wonderful message of celebration and I love a good party! Today's message is about David's celebration as the recovered Ark of the Covenant is brought back to Jerusalem. The Ark had been regarded, since Moses' time, as the dwelling place of God in the midst of His people. After many years in captivity it is brought home to the nation's capital with great rejoicing.

Three times, this reading emphasises the singing and dancing with which the Ark of the Lord was brought to the tent which David had erected for it on Mount Zion.

Michal, David's wife and the daughter of King Saul, had a bit of a negative reaction to David's dancing in the streets. She frowned upon this primitive display. Some may have interpreted this reading as if David might have revealed a little too much of himself as he kicked and danced his way through the streets wearing very little. But what happened, in fact, was that David saw the return of the Ark as a joyous but solemn occasion. And he saw it unfit for himself to wear his royal garments, and instead he wore a very simple garment, an ephod.

David's dancing may have been part of a prolonged and complex liturgical procession. The details are long lost, but its intensity remains in the description of David's whirling and leaping. But despite the celebratory aspects, David might well have been terrified of the power of this Ark should anything go wrong before he got it home, especially considering Uzzah's demise when he'd reached out to stop the Ark from slipping off the cart. (I wonder why those who loaded the ark on the cart didn't receive the same treatment from God, having had to touch it?)

Nevertheless, Michal who purportedly loved David very much, seemed to be really angry about David's perceived impropriety. However, we must look at the context in which this celebration takes place. God had turned his face against King Saul and He had blessed David and promised him a Kingdom and a Covenant that would last forever. That's part of the story in Samuel. It is not surprising that Michal would come to despise her husband David, because he was about to take her father's throne, and she knew it.

A further point can be made that David's first and deepest allegiance was to God. And he saw it only fitting to dance in celebration of the God who had chosen him and his descendants to be a covenant partner forever. David felt it to be inappropriate to come before God as the King of Israel; rather he came as a common servant and partner with the people of God, acknowledging the kingship and rule of God in Israel. In this context, as I have previously mentioned, he perceived his royal garments to be an impediment to worship God in humility and truth.

When God calls us to be His covenant partners we are wise to remove all impediments that may stand between God and us. Rather than elevating ourselves before God, we are called to humility and awe before the God who has saved us. God is King and He deserves our humblest devotion and praise. In view of all this, I feel I should shed these beautiful liturgical garments as I come to worship, and maybe we shouldn't wear our "Sunday best" to church, perhaps jeans or trackies would be more in order! Of course I jest. I believe it is the internal impediments that stand between us and God that one needs to acknowledge and shed in order that we come before our God with proper humility and awe.

When we talk about David dancing in the streets we might relate this to some stories we hear about some communities in the African Independent Churches. Our African brothers and sisters are much more expressive in their worship than most people in our Western churches are. They often dance and sing on their way to church on Sunday morning, some travelling five or ten miles each way, dancing every step.

I wonder how our faith might be affected if we sang and danced our way to church? And I wonder how would non-church people perceive us? They would think we had fallen and bumped our heads, or perhaps they'd think we'd had wine instead of milk on our Corn Flakes for breakfast!

It's not that we have no reason to celebrate our faith. Indeed, we have a lot of reason to celebrate and give praise to God. "The Ark of God's Covenant" has been in our midst, so to speak. We know the love of Jesus Christ, and we know that God is still at work in our lives. Plenty of reason for us to kick up our heels!

This calls for an unreserved celebration of our faith. As we celebrate and rejoice before God, as David and the Israelites did, we pass on the inheritance of our faith to generations yet to come. Our children and grandchildren will see what it is that is most important to us. Therefore, I reckon we should have the freedom to express more openly and intentionally our love of God in our lives and in our worship. Now I don't mean that we should become what some would call "happy/clappy," though I guess some people choose to express themselves that way and that's OK for them. I'm not exactly suggesting that you "rock and roll" on the way to church or do the wahtoozie on the way back to your seat from Communion, but it would be my prayer that you feel the joy within our worship and that that joy would remain with you.

We are chosen by Jesus Christ to celebrate God's love and grace toward us. We are invited to be expressive in our gratitude toward God. The Christian life is a life of joy and celebration.

When our lives are touched by the love of God, His grace flows into this world through the channel of our love, healing it, straightening its twistedness, mending its brokenness, and enlightening its darkness. That is the celebration of the Christian life: to touch the lives of others and so invite them to experience the blessings of God.

Our Lord invites us to be intentional about our celebration of God's grace. It would be great if we could express God's praise with every breath we take. Let us be a people who celebrate the goodness of God and the joy of being his children.

May God's Spirit enable us to be free in our celebration of the one who saves us and who dwells in our midst.

The Lord be with you.

Rev. Linda
St Paul's Cathedral, Bendigo
15th July, 2012