**SONGS OF PRAISE**

**2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12-15**

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand.

 2 David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim.

 3 They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart

 4 with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark.

 5 David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

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

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

 14 David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod.

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

**Psalm 150**

 Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament!

 2 Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

 3 Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp!

 4 Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe!

 5 Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

 6 Let everything that breathes praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!

**Luke 19:28-40 (p.83)**

29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples,

 30 saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here.

 31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'"

 32 So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them.

 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

 34 They said, "The Lord needs it."

 35 Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.

 36 As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road.

 37 As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen,

 38 saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop."

 40 He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

**SERMON**

I love music; I guess I always have. I had music lessons since I was in first grade until I graduated high school, and with that even all the musical education, including history, theory, composition and what else. I first learned to play a recorder and then the flute; I taught myself guitar, and I can pick a piano, just enough to be dangerous, but not able to really play. My bucket list have me learning to really play the piano, the cello and the alto sax. When I was not playing in an orchestra, I was singing in a choir. And because I love singing, I even gave voice training a try. I also love singing in church choirs, because it gives me more chances to sing in a service than anyone else. I love listening to music just as much. I grew up with classical music (my dad still believes that Bach is what we will hear in heaven), but I like it all - classical, pop, rock, blues, jazz, maybe just not country so much. There is something about music that speaks to me, and I would venture a guess, us, in a way that our rational reason and words cannot. There is something in music that reflect the way we feel, or at least “sooth our souls” – that gives outing to what we feel.

But what does that have to do with Sundays and our worship. Yes, there are music during our worship – the prelude, the hymns, the offertory, the postlude, the special music… But it not quite the same, you may say. I may say, why not? Does not music during our service, our singing, in some way reflect how we feel? And yes, we don’t always sing songs of praise, but sometimes songs of lament or confession or answering to the call. And sometimes we just sit and listen to someone else and let the music carry us away. You see, to me, in our regular lives, music seems to play such a major role. Songs that are happy, or sad, or angry or just peaceful. And we dance, or sing along or cry and relax. Why not in church?

I grew up in a very conservative church – we were only allowed to sing the psalms, and I am not sure whether we were allowed to look happy when we did – and if we were, I never saw it on people’s faces, or in their body language. Maybe I found religion, or maybe things just make more sense to me now; but it is hard for me to not get involved in what we sing, especially when we praise God, or come in adoration before him. It feels to me that we are so cerebral during the service, that we need something else to also involve our emotions and feelings a little more. And don’t get me wrong, I am not talking about getting all “crazy”, but at least feeling something. And maybe it also gives us the opportunity to get involved in the service, instead of just sitting in a pew, pretending to listen to all the talking….

The Psalms are full of examples of singing praises to God. “I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me” (Ps. 13:6); “Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name.” (Ps. 30:4); “Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds-- his name is the LORD-- be exultant before him.” (Ps. 68:4); “O sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.” (Ps. 96:1); “Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works.” (Ps. 105:2); and “I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.” (Ps. 146:2). So are the prophets and so is the Book of Revelation, where the angels and the elders and all the Saints sing to the Lamb on the Throne. Even the first New Testament church in Acts praised God. But David really got into it – dancing and all.

I have wondered at times whether the Bible or Paul or Calvin got it wrong with this story. It honestly seems that it belongs in someone else’s Bible, someone like my Pentecostal relatives or someone whose DNA doesn’t match my decent and orderly reformed solemnity. But alas, this story of King David kicking up his heels and making merry before God is in my Bible as well as in yours. For those of us who are the *traditional* veterans of worship, here’s a text to ignore, or explain away, or do just about anything with other than learn from it. That’s all the more reason to linger over it with an open heart and mind.

But first, let us dig into the history of this story a little. The ark of the Covenant is an gold-covered wooden chest with above the lid, a golden plate upon which two cherubim, with raised wings and facing each other, covered the ark. From the place between the two cherubim God promised to speak to Moses. It contained the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, Aaron’s rod and a pot of manna. The ark was designed to be a symbol of the presence of God in the midst of His people, a reminder of God and his mighty deeds to free Israel and being with them through their journey in the wilderness.

The Israelites took the Ark with them on their journey to Canaan. No one dared to look at it, or touch it, as it carried the presence of God with it – it was holy. When carried, the Ark was always hidden under a large veil made of skins and blue cloth, always carefully concealed, even from the eyes of the priests and the Levites who carried it. When Israel had been conquered by the Philistines, they took the ark away with them. The many misfortunes that overtook them made them think that the possession of the ark was destructive to them and they sent it back. It actually traveled quite extensively, but eventually rested at the house of Abinadab for twenty years. David noticed the blessings poured out on the people where the ark was housed, and decided that the Ark needed to return to God’s people; to Jerusalem. And maybe he forgot exactly how holy the Ark was, as he saw Uzzah die while trying to this to keep the ark from falling. He was frightened, needed a period to figure this out, but finally he succeeded in bringing the Ark to Jerusalem with great rejoicing. The mood was one of joy and celebration appropriate to the triumphal procession of the Lord. God will be among his people once again.

Now, there might be a heck of a lot more to this story than just David dancing before the ark when he finally got it back to Jerusalem, amongst God’s people – his political prowess, his relationship with his wife, Michal or whatever else, but I want to focus on David’s reaction for a minute.

See, the Ark symbolized God’s presence, and by bringing it into Israel’s capital city, the people were effectively saying that their lives would center around God. The holy God, who saved them from Egypt and travelled with them through the wilderness, will be present in their midst again. And David was really getting into the spirit of the event; the event of reuniting “God” with his people, that he was dancing without restraint as an act of praise to God.

You know, there is a history of the presence of God being so powerful that lives are at stake.  It seems to have to do with respect and with rejoicing before the Lord.  If the presence of the Lord in the Ark came into Farmington today, how would we respond. When we realize that the presence of God is among us, what will we do? Will we run in fear? Will we dance and sing before it as it came down the street, or will we just stand and look, our hands neatly folded together, decent and in order? David danced….

When Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, to meet his death, the people shouted out Hosanna while waving palm branches and throwing their garments on the road. They sang and rejoiced – so much so that the Pharisees told Jesus to shut them up. Just as Michal did not receive David’s exuberant worship well. In fact, she despised him. It almost made me think about my childhood when no praise and worship songs were allowed to be sung, no dancing anywhere, let alone church, or you might be seen as out of order; maybe a little “crazy”. So, should Michal be understood as the first champion of traditional, decent-and-in-good-order worship? If so, she doesn’t come out of this incident as one whom God favors. And think for a moment about Jesus’ response: "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

The presence of the Lord as something that can move heaven and earth and bring life and, yes, death. And maybe we don’t always want to think about that. But, here we are, back on holy ground, only a few months removed from Easter.  Aren't we, in fact, Easter People? Or even Christmas people? Did we not just celebrate the coming of God as Jesus into our midst, as a human; as the one who is coming to save us; to give us new life? Don't we want to celebrate the incarnation and resurrection all year round?

Can you imagine simply dancing in the presence of God?  Can you imagine singing his praises with joy? It used to be that we would even debate what type of music should be in worship and is truly worshipful and what IS proper worship of the Lord in the church. We live in our heads so much of the time these days. But what David remembered, and what we have to remembered too, is that the presence of God is a blessing and is to be celebrated, even in the midst of all of its power. David was liturgically dancing, because, in some way, God COMMANDS celebration as the presence of God shows up into the community. When God is present, we cannot help but shout out “Hosannah” and “Hallelujah”. We cannot help but singing and praising God, when we remember what God has done for us; that he is present with us; that he will always we present with us; even amidst his power, his mystery and the dark hours of our lives. This is why David danced...because sometimes in the presence of God and all that blessing, we don't ask why, we just give in to our childlike side and dance and sing. We give into this celebration, the God ordained response to the ark, the very mystery and presence of God, coming into our city.

To me, singing our hymns during the worship service, is the way we get to sing God’s praises. To just let go a little bit – to be involved, to let our hearts rise within us with thankfulness, with adoration, with praise, with calling out in prayer. It is the time we can truly celebrate God’s presence among us. It is the time to make merry before God when something wonderful occurs. When God is present among us, it is a momentous occasion and it deserves to be celebrated with songs of praise. And heaven help us, if the rocks have to sing in our stead.