

Pastor's Message – 7/11/21

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 10-15

Ephesians 1:3-14

2 Samuel 6:17-19

It's the middle of summer. Many of the Congregation are away, especially that we are coming out of pandemic, doing what many would like to be doing in mid-July – getting away.

When you are away, you have the opportunity to in other Churches and know that different Churches do their Sunday worship in different ways. I had that same opportunity last week. I hope that you bring back the best things of other Churches for us to try here. However, I suspect for the most part, many churches, mainline Sunday worship, like ours, is pretty much planned out and is supposed to done, in and out, in an hour. Sunday worship is, for the most part, contained and controlled so that David would probably be politely escorted out for disrupting the service.

As I have reflected on Sunday worship over the years and participated in Sunday worship over the years, I've concluded that our worship can be like football. Consider NCAA Football Rule 9-2, Article 1(a)(1)(d), as cited on Wikipedia regarding end-zone celebrations: "A signature feature of many televised football games is the end-zone dance, by which a touchdown-scoring player cavorts for a few moments before his adoring fans. According to the NCAA rules, such displays are illegal and can result in a 15-yard penalty against the dancer's team: Prohibited behaviors include 'Any delayed, excessive, prolonged or choreographed act by which a player (or players) attempts to focus attention upon himself (or themselves).'"

It's pretty much a fact that we are uncomfortable with more exuberant and expressive forms of worship. We may even look askance at people who dance or even clap in worship. During my Course of Study at Garret-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, IL, as part of our worship class, we

would attend other Churches in the area. A group of us went to an AMEZ (African Methodist Episcopal Zion) church one Sunday.

During their Sunday worship service, at one point, a number of the worshippers left their pews and danced their offerings down the aisles. We went with them, not knowing any better, and later learned that those were the folks who were taking their tithe up to the altar, celebrating their blessings from God which enabled them to tithe.

In the first part of our Bible reading from 2 Samuel today, we heard how David – **King** David – danced before the Ark of God which symbolized for the Israelites the presence of God. Music, song, and dance gave vivid expression to the joy unleashed in the procession that accompanied the ark. Did you know that the Hebrew verb for “celebrating” in verse 5 also has the meaning of “laugh” and even “play?” Spontaneity and lightness spill through the whole text. King and warriors and all the people play in celebration of God's presence.

When God is in the house, it calls for celebration. Worship too often has ignored or dismissed the celebratory nature of the people of God gathered in the presence of God. When God is present with us, it is cause for great celebration! In our own way, we can celebrate today and maybe even dance. **We Are God's People** and so we gather to adore God, **joyful, joyful**, singing **Halle, Halle, Hallelujah**. We might even dance with the **Lord of the Dance** as we celebrate all that God has done for us.

I've mentioned in the past that Paul was a Pharisee, a learned man and he wrote like a Pharisee, so it can be difficult sometimes to read his Letters. That's why I scheduled a paraphrase of his Letter to the Ephesians this week – from The Message. But it's worth reading and there is inspiration in the letter for us.

In spite of the long and complex sentences in Ephesians 1:3-14, Paul's enthusiasm spills over in outlining God's vision for the world. He writes about how

God created the world with us in mind, focusing His love on us and wanting us to be whole and holy. God sent His only Son to be our Savior that we might be free from sin and death and able to make the choice for Jesus – free of penalties: no fifteen-yard penalties for excessive celebrating here!

We are adopted into God's family – chosen and named as God's own beloved children. He offers the promise of salvation for all who will accept it and prepares a place for us that we can call home: free from all the sin and evils and pain and suffering of this present world. That's something worth celebrating. God comes to us, living and working right in our midst.

Our reading from 2 Samuel today expresses the joy that the Israelites experienced as they came into the presence of God. We heard the story of how the Ark of God was transferred from Baalah of Judah to the house of Obed-edom and finally to Jerusalem. "The LORD has blessed Obed-edom's household and everything he has because of the Ark of God," King David was told. "So, David went [there] and brought the Ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the City of David with a great celebration" so that he and all of Jerusalem might be blest too.

But the story does not end with dancing. After worshiping God with abandon David made a burnt offering to the Lord, and then he blest the people and fed them bread and meat and a cake of raisins. The people were not just filled with the Spirit of the Lord, but they were filled with good things to eat as well!

When people come to worship in our church, do they find a Spirit of joyful abandon? Are they allowed to come and be themselves, laying their hearts open before God? Or do we expect them to behave in ways that are predetermined? What kind of enthusiasm will guests experience in our Church? Will they see and hear hopeful and confident plans for the future? What sounds or sights help them experience the presence of God here in this place? What

might a newcomer see and hear that would tell her or him that your Congregation rejoices in God's presence?

Have you ever heard of re-gifting? It's a pop-culture term for receiving a gift and then giving it to someone else. If you've heard of it and probably you have, what do you think of it? The way I see it, there are two approaches to re-gifting, like the question of whether the glass is half-empty or half-full.

One might think that a re-gifter is impossibly cheap, preferring to give away a gift they have received rather than going out to buy something new. Further, one might assume that the re-gifter did not like the gift in the first place if she/he was so quick to get rid of it.

On the other hand, what if the re-gifter liked the gift so *much* that they just had to share it with someone else, rather than keep it only for themselves? And what if they're not cheap, but true believers in recycling? So, what if we receive the gift of spiritual blessings in Christ, and we choose to re-gift by passing it along to someone else? What kind of a re-gifter would we rather be?

After David had brought the Ark of the LORD and set it in its place and offered the appropriate sacrifices, "[Then] he gave to every Israelite man and woman in the crowd a loaf of bread, a cake of dates, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people returned to their homes. Is that it? Is that all that's going to happen here? After we have celebrated God's blessings, will we all just return to our homes?

God's presence among us invites celebration. However, celebrated or not, welcomed or not, God's presence awaits our response. What are we going to do with God's blessings? David danced with all his might, and we are invited to do the same. Do we too dance before the LORD, celebrating, laughing and playing before the LORD? We have been blest and, having been blest, we have a gift to share. Let's dance our way out and celebrate not just here and now, but all week wherever we go!