

Reflection: July 14 2024 Rev'd Ian Brown

2 Samuel 6: 1 – 5, 12b – 17

Eph 1: 2 - 6

“there was dancing!!”

In a time when people are excited about such marvels as bluetooth and phones with TV reception, or transistors the size of an atom; - you are interested in these aren't you? Or perhaps investigating the geology of distant planets, theorizing about dark matter - it's little wonder many people ask, "why bother with an ancient book full of strange old stories?"

And, “fair question”, we might say! Why take notice of old stories about primitive civilizations and today, why bother about what excited an ancient king? - I did wonder about how strange a story this is! It covers the time of celebration after resolving a leadership dispute in Israel between the old king Saul and the new boy, David, but it's just stale news at that level - so what!

A dancing King though, that's something. In Australia, people who show a lot of emotion are treated as suspect or not quite right. This is certainly not something we imagine Charles of England doing, even in London. We don't like to go overboard or "loose control". We aren't good at expressing feelings openly, or sometimes in private as well.

If you cry, you are said to have “broken down.” That's extraordinary language if you think about it! Tears are a natural, God given gift, not a sign of brokenness.

It says that to show emotion is to be dysfunctional! David was a leader who was prepared to show some emotional leadership – I think these days leaders are more intent on dancing around the truth than much else.

People who are expressive, whether the emotion is joyful or angry, happy or sad, find that the expression of their feelings makes others uncomfortable. Imagine if someone spontaneously burst into a dance of joy in the middle of worship here one Sunday,

suddenly carried away! Are we more likely to join in, or call an ambulance?

David had some good reasons for his happiness. He had recently been made King of all Israel, the Bible tells us. He danced with all his might in front of the ark of God as it was being brought into Jerusalem.

Were they all much more free with their feelings in those days? Have things changed so much? Was it normal for a King to dance wildly in the streets? The David we know from these stories was not one for doing things by half measures. Whether he set out to battle, to praise or bring the tribes of Israel together as a nation, he did it with a wholehearted enthusiasm, he threw his whole self into it. We also know that later in his story he gets himself quite wholly into trouble. In this episode David's wife, Michal gets upset – maybe because he didn't dance with her! You can almost see how dancing got a bad name with some of our more puritanical forebears!

But the theme of the Samuel passage is actually the worship of God - and David used no half measure here either.

Praise is a theme we all know something about, it's part of the reason why we are here. But our worship can get into the rut of dry ritual, our enthusiasm can get jaded, even with our favourite old, or new hymns and worse, we can come to see praise rather than to engage in it actively ourselves.

A catechism of the Reformation that many of you will be familiar with, had this as its first and most important teaching; "the chief aim of humanity is to glorify God and enjoy God forever". (-modern translation.) This is our reason for being!

Glorifying God, all of us bringing our praise to God is the main focus of our worship. The hymns we sing are about what God has done and not about what we have done or ought to do. In church we come and all participate in the main aim, to praise and worship God.

We are all here to do the one thing; to give glory to God. This is exactly what David was doing, he glorified God with all his might, without care for what the people around him might think. Think for a moment about why his praise was so exuberant. The ark of the covenant had laid mostly forgotten for the last 20 years. David had just been made king over all Israel, having been king of Judah for 7 years already. It was not a united kingdom up to this point, and as we read in the chapter just before this story, Jerusalem had only just been conquered from the Jebusites, so Israel hadn't been cemented together under Saul.

It was time for a new beginning in Israel, with the territory more secured than it had been in the past and a new united nation under strong and Godly leadership. So to mark this transition David calls on the tradition of the past. He hit on the idea of bringing the symbol of God's presence, the ark of the covenant into his new city from where it had been forgotten, in the country.

David binds the old ways to the new future. By bringing the ark to Jerusalem he is re-engaging with the taproot of Israel's religious vitality, the long standing tradition of their faith ... is made relevant to the present.

David shows us that the presence of God is something to be celebrated with unashamed extravagance. God's presence is the only thing that would unify them as a nation, God's presence is what unifies us as a church. It's about taking the old and giving it a place in the new, linking past present and future.

Now David, we could say, was excitable, it was in his character to do that, to dance and carry on. Is it appropriate for us though? Dancing, music, tambourines, exuberant expression?

What might we do here, in the spirit of this reading? David used the ark of God's presence, an old symbol, and he used it in a new way, for a new time. We need to do the same. Not with arks but with the gospel and our experience of God. David looked at his situation and thought about the need, the

resources, he thought about what could be done and he did it, even though there was a cost for him!

We need to look for what is needed around us and do something about it, look for ways of revitalizing our faith, our life and our church, and of course, look for ways of expressing our joy for what God has done for us and do it not just in church, but in the everyday things of life. The good news that excited David is far from being outdated or irrelevant, it's still the same stuff of turning lives around. Ephesians expresses it like this:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ.

This gospel that brings hope and meaning is cause for even more celebration than we see in David dancing before God. May it be real in us too, to the glory of God! Amen