

Preached by Carl Rush
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
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Mark 6: 14-29
Ephesians 1: 3-14
2 Samuel 6: 1-5; 12-21

LETTING DOWN OUR GUARD

This story of the Ark of the Covenant coming into Jerusalem—the City of David, the new capital of a new King, symbolic of all the hopes and dreams of the people—is possibly one of the most seamless, the clearest, the most genuine expression of the sequences in the history of faith; God acting to correct Saul’s abuses and blessing a red-headed boy named David.

How are we to take this story and make it our own? Remember the Ark made of acacia wood—a simple device and really in the beginning part of the paraphernalia of war. It was part of the battle equipment taken into the field by the Israelite armies as they battled those who were so much larger and more powerful—the enigmatic Philistines who David had slain by the hundreds in order to win Michal as his wife. Remember how Saul made an offering of her to him, and David not only paid a dowry for her, but he doubled the amount. He paid twice as much as the bargain had called for.

And now Michal and David are at odds because David danced shamelessly—it says, foolishly—before the Lord and before all the common people. This was an extravagant celebration—well planned, meticulously designed. This was the King of David and God (Yahweh) throwing a party! David has let his guard down—he is completely and enthusiastically immersed in the celebration. He is inebriated with the spirit of God.

Now you can imagine Michal’s utter disgust. She had grown up in the palace in the king’s household. She knew how royals were to conduct themselves and this behavior of David was no way for a king to act. Yes, he had been anointed King of Israel. The priest had come and selected him from all of his brothers. He had awaited his time and yes, Saul had been deposed. He’d been moved off of the throne and his disposition from the leadership had been a rite that took place within the church. The cardinal always anoints the king, and this is what was going on for David until he gets the Ark and bring it back to his new capital.

Again, remember what happened to the Ark before this. It had been captured by those same Philistines that David had once defeated; but the whole time they had the Ark in their possession, they were beset by boils and plagues and one calamity after another, so they shipped it off. It had resided on the hillside at Abinadab’s house until David went to get it. And then poor Uzziah. He reaches out to steady the Ark and dies, just because he is intent on taking matters into his own hands.

It is a frightful thing indeed to be indifferent to God’s laws and God’s commands. So for a time after Uzziah’s death, the Ark stays at another farmhouse. David hears how eve-

rything that this man touches turns into profitability and wonder, simply because the Ark is there. It is an amazing thing to be in God's presence, and this Ark symbolizes the presence of God. It is an idol more like a throne upon which the God of Israel sits. And if you worship God, the Ark is symbolic of God's blessings for you. Now if you oppose God and God's rule, there are plagues, and sores, and difficulty in life.

Nothing's really changed for us, has it? Remember the presence of God is indeed a powerful and awesome spirit. It's what we celebrate in this sanctuary in worship. It's what we are supposed to be doing, as David did. In fact, one of the commentaries I read had a footnote that suggested that any minister worth his salt would dance into the sanctuary today to remind us of the true nature of worship.

Is it passion inflamed where we feel ourselves drawn into God's spirit? And dare we say it ... have we ever been as elated, as intoxicated, as David was on this day with the spirit of the Lord and God's power in our midst?

I think David bringing the Ark into Jerusalem is very similar to what happens in the church today. The church deals with bad news very well, but we have a hard time with good news. We always want or seem to push it into another realm. The "yes, but ..." or the "not in my sanctuary ..." syndrome of grand expectations. Good news. It's hard to find somebody that really can celebrate when you have good news. Who'd you call the last time you bought a new car? There was hardly anyone close enough to celebrate with you, was there?

Who do you share good news with when it's just absolutely over the moon? We're embarrassed by it. We received news this week. Contrary to what we thought, commitments to our second building campaign have exceeded everyone's expectations. We are now over our celebration point. Over \$850,000 has been pledged, and there are still literally dozens or folks who I know are planning to pledge and have not pledged yet. There's no telling what the final number will be, and yet we are so afraid to talk about the good news. So afraid we'll offend somebody who has already decided they don't want to participate; but boy, they really want to now. Even if it's just a dollar a week they want to be part of this wonderful celebration.

This passage really boils down to this today—you either find yourself with David, or you find yourself with Michal. Have you got your faith all finished and polished? Is it picture perfect—what you should do and what you shouldn't do? And are you pretty sure that if you see someone who's enthusiastic about their faith, they probably haven't got theirs figured out quite yet. They don't have their's under control.

I love the fact that the Ark is a seat for God and not containing God, even though it may contain some famous patriarch's bones or the Ten Commandments (or whatever is in there). God is not contained in the ark. God is so much greater than even this celebration.

C.S. Lewis said in *Mere Christianity*, “In the presence of God you either forget yourself altogether or see yourself as a small dirty object—and it is much better to forget about yourself altogether.” He advises that when you are in God’s presence it’s best not to take yourself too seriously. That’s what Mechal was doing. David just saw himself as part of a common everyday celebration.

When our children were growing up, more than anything else, I wanted them to have an enthusiasm for life; and they got that from their mother—a real passion for what is positive and good in this world. More than anything else, more than intellect or position or honors, more than popularity and standing among their peers, I wanted them to live life with enthusiasm. I remember the first time they finally got to go on a youth mission trip. Our son, who took everything very seriously and always has, was most concerned that when we arrived, there wasn’t an enthusiastic unpacking of the bus. People just got off and walked away, and he was pretty sure that I was going to explode any moment because there wasn’t that same enthusiasm as when we arrived wherever we were going on a vacation or a family trip.

What would it take for Bush Hill to celebrate the enthusiasm and commitment, not of a building campaign, but of our love for one another? What would it take for us to overtly express to one another that we are truly excited to be in God’s presence—to be loved by God so much that we can’t help but love one another? How do we shake off the properness and the tendency to correct one another? How do we shake off the Michal syndrome of saying how you debased yourself today; you looked so foolish? What would it take for us to be foolish in one another’s eyes for the glory of the Lord, or foolish in the world’s eyes? Look around in this congregation. We have such grand dreams—such a passion for sharing the good news. And it’s so easy to criticize or be corrected—to talk about how the church isn’t about building, it’s about people.

I’m glad that some brave souls were foolish enough to build this sanctuary almost fifty years ago. It has stood well, as many families at heart have observed. And I’m more excited because people love to come in here; and if not openly, at least inwardly, their spirits dance in revival and renewal.

Go out today and prepare yourself for the parade and the tambourines for the celebration that God still has in store for you and for your home and for your loved ones. Go out today and if you hear anyone acting Mechalish, you just step back and say with David, “I’m willing to be seen as even more foolish than ever before because I know how much God has forgiven me and how much God loves me today and invites me and you and all of us to join the dance. Let your guard down. That’s the only way Christ can ever enter in.

So may it be. Amen.