

II Samuel 6:1-5, 12-19
July 11, 2021
The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings

With my apologies to Chris and Paul and Zoe and Emma Gobble, I missed the July 4th parade this year. We were busy getting the house ready for Kendall and Kim to visit and we just didn't make it. And that's too bad, because I love parades. They are intentionally happy, even joyful moments. They happen to celebrate something or to announce something great. The one we read about in II Samuel is to announce the bringing of the ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. You'll remember that David has now been named king over all of Israel. That's something to celebrate, isn't it?

When David conquers the city of Jerusalem to make it his capital, he knows that there is something lacking. For it to be the capital for God's people, he needs to bring into it the Ark of the Covenant. God had instructed the priests back when the people were wandering in the wilderness to make a box of acacia wood and overlay it with gold. Inside they were to keep the tablets of the Ten Commandments (along with the rod of Aaron, brother of Moses, and some of the manna they had been eating as a reminder of how God had provided for them). This box had been carried by the people into battle with their enemies with the belief that if the ark went with them, then God went with them too.

In establishing his kingship and Jerusalem as his capital, David is savvy enough to know that he needs to showcase the patron deity that gives inspiration and comfort to the newly united nation. David's parade symbolizes the entrance of God into the city. The people line the streets; the musicians are out in force; and food is passed out for all. Then, to top it all off, King David drops all his royal robes and begins dancing before the ark as it is carried up the hill to Jerusalem; he dances and whirls and cavorts in his joy. David is young and he is king and God has blessed him and all is right with the world. He celebrates and God celebrates and all the people celebrate with them.

Well, almost all...

David's wife Michal sits looking out a window at this spectacle and the text says, "She despises David in her heart." Why?

You may remember that Michal was the daughter of the previous king, Saul. Maybe you might think she is jealous; that it rankles her to know that her father never got this kind of parade or reception. Or maybe you think she is embarrassed; that David should be more dignified—at least keep his clothes on—if he's going to dance. Singing and dancing and in front of all those slave girls too! Perhaps she doesn't believe that David's motives are as pure as they appear to be to the people who have vowed to be his loyal subjects.

Michal had once been very much in love with David and the two had married when Saul was still king and David was in Saul's favor after having defeated Goliath. Later Michal does her best to protect her husband when her father's violent spells would set in and she helped to shield David from his fits of rage.

But much has happened between the couple since these early days. Fate did not treat them kindly. They were separated by Saul's anger, by the years when David rebelled against Saul, leaving Michal with her father. When David finally returns, Michal sees that he wants the kingship for himself and he will do almost anything to get it. He partners with the Philistines when it suits him, he marries other women if it will gain him a political advantage. And, like all good Kings, he has children, one after the other, eleven sons eventually.

But, he makes the strategic decision to have no child with Michal—because he can't take the chance

that there might be a descendant of Saul to challenge him for the throne. Therefore, he no longer comes to her bed chambers.

So what is this parade about? Is David dancing through the streets because he is overcome with joy or because he is intentionally rousing the religious fervor of the people so they will attribute some religious legitimacy to him? Does he disrobe and show himself to the people of Jerusalem because he loses himself in charismatic devotion or because he is vain and proud of his physique?

So which of these is true? Was David the man after God's own heart? Did he deserve to be the king after whom all other kings would be measured? Was his the golden age of Israel, the time to which succeeding generations always wanted to return?

Or was David a sly, cunning and deceitful man? Was he a sinful, adulterous and murderous rogue who gained the throne in questionable circumstances and would do whatever he could to hang on to it?

The answer, I think is “yes.” David is all of those things. I think the writer of the books of Samuel shows a wonderful biography of a true human being. As we go through the stories of David we'll see him do wonderful things—but things that are not untouched by selfishness. And we'll see him do terrible things—but things that are not untouched by regret and sorrow. In other words, David is a lot like us.

So is that the lesson for today? Are we just supposed to accept that none of our motives are purely good or purely evil, and say, “Oh well?” Or is there something else going on here? One of the reasons that we are reading the stories of David through this summer is not just to see all the things that happen to him or to judge the things he does, or even to see God work through him. But it is to see if David grows. Does his relationship with God change? Does he grow as a human being? One of God's goals

for each of us is for us to grow up into the likeness of Christ. In other words, God wants us to grow into the fully mature human beings that God created us to be. Does that happen with David? Is his faith in God different now as a king from what it was when he defeated Goliath? He hasn't always known success like he did that day, what has that told him about God?

I think he is growing, a bit anyway. When he responds to Michal "It was before the Lord that I have danced." Before the Lord. David at least knows that all his actions, bad and good and mixed, are done in the eyes of God. When he realizes that his desire is not so much to glorify himself, but to please God, he grows. I wonder if we are growing that way as well.

After worship today