

Have you ever refrained from doing something in the fear of what other people might think? Or more dangerously have you ever done things just to see what people's reactions would be? Growing up as a young adult I did many mad things with my peers that was all about me getting the laughs. I did it because I ended up being the centre of attention. I think over the years I've grown up and left those silly things behind. But in today's reading we are going to see someone very prominent acting in a way which actually gets two reactions – some look at him weirdly and others saw it as a genuine sign of taking the spotlight off himself and onto God.

As we dive into this passage this morning, let me pray.

PRAY

So where are we this morning with our reading? David has the Ark of the Lord in his possession. But after an incident where the ark was being transported in the back of a cart along the road to Jerusalem, a guy called Uzzah put his hand out to steady it and ensure it doesn't fall. So, in turn, Uzzah dies immediately for touching the ark as it's holy. David's now scared about taking the ark to Jerusalem, so what does he do? Well, he puts it in somebody's house.

He sticks it in the house of a man called Obed-Edom. Now that might not seem so bad, after all David's keeping it safe, isn't he? But David needs to place it somewhere safe, especially after what has happened to Uzzah. Now you can imagine people popping over to Obed's house, noticing a massive box sitting in the corner. "Obed, what's this box about?" "Well, I don't quite know but I tell you this, since it's been here our family life has been absolutely marvellous. The kids aren't fighting, our crops this year are amazing. It's almost as if David's God is blessing us".

What a real contrast that David is seeing here. At the beginning he's full of dread having the memory of Uzzah's life on his hands, and now he sees 3 months of blessing for a family.

So, this is the turning point where David now resumes his journey to Jerusalem. And our scripture tells us that there is much rejoicing as they make their way towards the city and how David goes about this is clearly so different to his initial approach of transport. This is not just about carrying your new washing machine home in the trailer; this is the ark of the Lord. Therefore, from now on its transport will be the responsibility of the Levites. Remember these are the tribe specifically given the responsibility for worship. So, what do we learn immediately? We learn that when it comes to worship, we must take it seriously because we are worshipping the Lord God Almighty. And so specifically for those that lead - choir, readers, band, singers, intercessors, whoever it is, you must take your role seriously. You can't just rock up on a Sunday morning and just get on with it. It requires prayerful consideration, it requires mastering your skill, it requires commitment of time. You are part of the Levite tribe; your role is incredibly privileged.

So now that the ark is on its way again, verse 13 tells us that after 6 steps, David sacrifices a bull and a fattened calf. Sacrifices recognised the need for forgiveness—

sacrifices of atonement, of thanksgiving. David has truly learnt his lesson, so as soon as possible, he ensures that God is honoured immediately.

So, rejoicing, sacrificing, and now in verse 14, we read that David dances. But he doesn't just dance, it says he dances before the Lord with all of his might. Now you might think that's a bit OTT especially when he's just back on the road again having had a 3-month break. But the point is that he's not doing this as some kind of display. No, it's a response from his heart. And that's what makes all the difference here. His worship is not just a set of tasks. It's heartfelt. Again, what can we learn about this for our worship. Well for me, it doesn't matter when we come together in worship that you're doing summersaults down the aisles, it doesn't matter to me if we have choral evensong, canticles whatever. But all of it, all of it must be before the Lord. If we come into worship and we in our hearts are going through the motions, then God will not honour it. Our worship should not be about what is prescribed in a prayer book or guided on a screen. They are instruments to help us in our worship, but our worship should be something that emerges from within. When we come to worship, we must bring our heart with us, otherwise it's not worship. Also remember that this is King David. He could so easily have done this as a declaration of his majesty, but no this was an expression of his humility. Therefore, as we come, with our hearts longing to worship the Lord, we all, including me, come humbly knowing that we are nothing without him. That folk is authentic worship. It affects how we prepare; it affects how we act; it affects how we respond.

So, we have rejoicing, sacrificing, and dancing, and finally in verse 15, David and the rest of the company are now shouting: "So David and all the people of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouts of joy and the blowing of rams' horns."

There's a right commotion going on, isn't there? I suspect many people will be looking at it all and wondering whether it's appropriate. And actually, it's no different today when we consider the many different churches we have based on different styles of worship.

Now it's possible that you're thinking, well thank goodness we don't have this in our own church, or maybe you're thinking you would like to have it? None of this is new folks - throughout the psalms, there are expressions of Praise - psalm 145 *My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever. Psalm 98 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music psalm 47 "Come, everyone! Clap your hands! Shout to God with joyful praise!"*

So it's absolutely clear that for those people observing David they would realise that something lay at the heart of all of this, and it was not restrained – there was dancing, there was shouting.

But these things always swing 2 ways. There will be those who accept different expressions of authentic heart filled worship, and then there will be those who find it all too much.

And so it is at this point that the narrator of our reading moves from the description of what is going on on the ground and takes us, as it were, behind the scenes.

Verse 16 - "But as the Ark of the Lord entered the City of David, Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked down from her window. When she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she was filled with contempt for him."

Can you remember who Michal was? Michal was the wife of David. Yes our reading says she is the daughter of Saul and the narrator here describes her as this for a good reason. We're getting an insight into the fact that although she had become betrothed to David, the roots of her convictions lay far more within the framework of her family life. She grew up as a princess in the house of the very first king of Israel. Michal knew what the proper etiquette for interacting with commoners was and it seems that she did not think that David's actions were up to par. She had watched her father Saul's patterns of worship, and therefore that was her benchmark. Saul would not have been as devout as David and certainly didn't hold God in the same level. Which raises a very important issue for us. Our children will watch what we do - we should model what we expect of them. Therefore, if we don't place worship at the heart of our lives then we cannot expect our children to. If we have children saying that Sunday worship is boring, then we must look at ourselves as parents and what they see in terms of our worship. We model what they then carry.

So now the narrator takes us back down onto the street. And now we're in real time once again, and in verse 17 as the Ark is carried into the city. What Michal had failed to see was what was really happening in this incident. You see the ark represented for the people the presence of the Lord with them. So, Jerusalem for 70 years had lost God's presence. But now with the return of the ark, the glory of the Lord was once again returning to Israel, as it were, and was being set right in the middle of their national lives. And through the sacrifice and peace offerings David is declaring, "We need, Lord, your cleansing provision for us. We need to know the peace which comes from knowing you, that you are the living and the true God. We want to give to you the praise and the honour that you deserve."

This gives us such a picture of who David is. As scripture declares him, he's a man after God's own heart. He's brought the glory of God back to the people. He could be revered as a hero. But no, all of David's focus is on the worship of God alone - nothing of his own achievements. Oh what lessons that gives each of us folks, especially for those who lead. Our need to point our entire thoughts, our hearts, our posture, towards the Lord, and not ourselves.

And so now (verse 18 & 19) as people head back home, David blesses them all and provides them all with a token of blessing - each gets a loaf and some cake. What a magical day. "Yeah," said somebody in the crowd, "it was memorable".

So, they're all gone, and all that remains is for David, verse 20, to return to "bless his household." - to go home and to bless those under his own roof. And, of course, the one to whom he goes is none other than Michal, the daughter of Saul. And you will notice that she doesn't even give him time to get his shoes off. He can't even hang up his linen ephod before she's on at him. And it just exudes sarcasm, doesn't it? She speaks now, you'll notice, in the third party: "How the king of Israel distinguished himself today." I imagine it's going something like this: "You call that acting like a king? No king acts like that! I know about kings. My father was the king. You don't really know much about being a king. After all, you were just an upstart shepherd

boy. You're fortunate that you managed to get where you are. But I am of the kind of background that gets this stuff. Kings," she says, "carry themselves with dignity. Kings clothe themselves with majesty. But you? Going around half naked before the eyes of the female servants of your servants..." Notice, she goes down as low as she can go. It's not just "before some of your work colleagues" No, no: "before the eyes of the female servants of your servants." These are the people who are cleaning stuff out at the end of the day in that kind of context. "That," she says, "is the kind of thing you find amongst the vulgar people. You don't find that coming out of the palace."

Well, how does David respond to that, "Oh, I'm sorry dear. I just shouldn't have done that. I've had a bad day. I mean, I started off with the cart. I shouldn't have approached this more dignified..." No, that's not his approach.

Verse 21 & 22 "David said to Michal, "It was before the Lord, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel—I will celebrate before the Lord. ²² I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honour."!"

In other words, what he's saying is "This was not about me. If you want people to bow to me because I'm the king, if you want people to cheer me, you're gonna be very disappointed. And let me remind you," he says in verse 21, "the Lord chose me. And incidentally, while I'm mentioning it, he chose me above your father and any heirs of your father." That must have stung hard for Michal to hear. But there's no expressions of self-pity on his part.

David is willing to go small in human terms so that the Lord will go bigger. Do you remember a similar situation where John the Baptist in John 3:30 says something similar - "he must become greater, I must become less". You can hear David saying that, can't you? "I would rather dance in the streets to the glory of God than ride in a chariot, Michal, just to keep you happy. Because you're concerned about dignity. You're concerned about position. You apparently are not remotely concerned about the glory of God and his purposes for his people.

David as King knew his place. And today's Church surely needs to know the same. We are nothing special. We, by the grace of God shown to us in the death & resurrection of Jesus can stand today in rejoicing. We should go low in order that the name of Jesus be lifted higher.

And so such a powerful image we have of David, of the heights a person is willing to go in their love, adoration and praise of the Lord, that the chapter ends with a rather sad verse: Verse 23 - "So Michal, the daughter of Saul, remained childless throughout her entire life."

You may this morning have different views on this verse. Does it seem fair that Michal is left without children? As a wife surely she should have a say on how her husband has conducted himself. I don't know your thoughts but it's good to take time to consider these further.

So, what have we learnt today about our posture in worship – we have learnt about the importance of our own preparation. It's not just a slot in the week – and it should be heart filled. Our own worship should be a model for our next generation, so if they don't see joy then we can't expect them to be attracted to it for their own lives and their children. And also, we've learnt that in worship, we remove ourselves from the spotlight so that all the honour and glory is placed on the Lord not ourselves.

Let me end by making two thoughts. - firstly, what is your position when you come in worship? Do you come prepared, or do you come waiting for the person at the front to take you through the liturgical elements? How does that compare to the characters in today's reading?

And I suppose secondly for us all today, "In the presence of God, am I willing to rejoice selflessly, exuberantly, unashamedly, in a manner that is not only noticeable to my friends and colleagues but may prove to be the occasion of disapproval among my family and my friends?

Let's just pause for a moment before we sing. The image of the woman who came to Jesus with the alabaster jar of expensive ointment comes to mind. She poured it on Jesus' head. The fragrance must have been amazing. It would be unmistakable. It would be on people for days. And when the disciples saw it—the disciples!—they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? This could have been sold." And Jesus said, "Why would you trouble the woman? She's done a beautiful thing to me. You've got the poor with you always. You won't always have me. Remember, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

You see that folks? It will be through an extravagant act of heartfelt worship to our Lord, that the Gospel is expressed. May our posture and act of worship be so heartfelt and genuine that it draws more to hear about the Lord whom we love.