

**Noosa Anglican - July 11, 2021**  
**2 Samuel 6**  
**DAVID - The Triumph and Tragedy of a Leader - Respecting God's Holiness**  
**Rev'd Lynda Johnson**

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How many of you have seen the movie Raiders of the lost Ark? I love the movie, and preparing this sermon has whetted my appetite for watching the whole series yet again! This reading makes me think of the scene towards the end of the first movie where the nazis and their archeologist have carefully set up the valley to open the Ark and find their treasure. There's a lot of things in that movie that are a bit over the top, but I reckon at least in that scene the director has tried to capture the awesome holiness of God, and in a limited way was successful in that task. The message was pretty clear - don't mess with God.

Now for us today, we've just heard a reading, where you get the very clear impression - don't mess with God.

Let's have a bit of a look at the history around this.

You'll remember last week, in 2 Samuel chapter 5, that David is now king, he overtook Jerusalem, settled there, took more wives and had lots more children.  
He had a war with the Philistines and won.

So quite a bit of time has passed.

Jerusalem is called the City of David and now David decides that the time has come for the Ark of the Lord to be brought into the city.

Now in the storyline, we haven't actually heard about the ark for quite a long time. The last time the Ark was mentioned was back in 1 Samuel 7.

Many years before King Saul had tried to win a battle by bringing up the Ark from Shiloh, but his ploy didn't work. God isn't a God who can be used or manipulated for our own ends.

In fact the Ark was captured by the Philistines. But, after a series of disasters hit them, and they blamed the Ark, they wanted rid of it and sent it back to Israel.

The first place the Ark went to [Beth Shemesh] some of the men there treated it with such disrespect that they died looking into it. This naturally terrified the people of Beth Shemesh to the extent that they asked "Who is able to stand before the LORD, where can he go that we can be rid of him?" (1 Sam 6:20)

They got rid of him by sending the Ark to Kiriath Jearim in Shiloh, where it remained for the next 20 years, in the home of Abinadab, and one of his sons was appointed to take charge of it.

And there it stayed until this moment in Israel's history, when David takes a huge army of chosen leaders of Israel to bring the Ark back into his newly established capital. In fact he thought it was so important that he took 30,000 men. David believed that if he is to rule from Jerusalem, then God must be seen to be ruling from Jerusalem as well. David is making Jerusalem the military focus, the political focus, and now, the religious focus of the nation.

Now this may be just a strategic act on David's part, to cement his place as king, but you realise as the story unfolds that it's much more than that. He understands the solemnity and the significance of this occasion, so he gathers together 30,000 of the leading men of Israel, which obviously makes him look good, doesn't it? He **even** has a new cart built to carry the Ark, and Uzzah and Ahio, two of the sons of Abinadab [remember the ark's been in their home for 20 yrs] they got to drive the new cart. Ahio at the front and Uzzah at the back. Can you see it all in your mind's eye.

The procession is a great time of worship. There's singing and dancing; the noise of loud instruments; loud rejoicing. Of course, it's appropriate for such an important occasion. Here is the central symbol of God's presence among them, the Ark of the LORD, coming to Jerusalem. What a spectacle.

But then disaster hits. The oxen stumble and the cart shakes and Uzzah puts out his hand to steady it. Not a good call. He dies immediately!

Now this is totally unexpected. Everything had been going so well.

But now Uzzah is dead.

And notice how David reacts.

He's angry. Angry at God. Angry that God has done this to an innocent man.

Now do you resonate with that reaction? Is it your reaction as well? Does it offend you? Is it a bit too much?

Well, it certainly offended David. Perhaps he wasn't as safe as he thought. And of course he's right.

God is God, and by definition, that means something. "He's the enthroned Lord almighty" as verse two describes.

It's all too easy to forget that the Lord we worship **is** God almighty, the Holy one, far removed from our ordinary lives.

We've domesticated God, and our worship is so often sanitised.

We remember Jesus Christ who lowered himself to come and live among us as a human being. We like that, because it's God being like us. We sit in nice, familiar surroundings singing songs of joy.

But sometimes we forget that God is the almighty one, the one before whom every knee shall bow when he comes to judge the living and the dead.

David and his men were caught up in the joy of knowing that their God was with them. David's kingdom was the result of God's blessing after all. But perhaps he'd forgotten that God was also the living God who demands full obedience from his people. And that's where Uzzah's death comes in.

You see, there are a number of issues that arise in this incident.

The first is the fact that the ark is being carried on a cart.

The instruction God gave to Moses, in Numbers 5-8, was that the ark should be carried by Levites on poles inserted through rings on the side of the Ark. But David had introduced this new technology in the form of a cart. Now even though it was a new cart, it was not how God had said the Ark was to be carried.

Secondly, Uzzah thinks that it's his job to take care of God. When it gives a bit of a shake he reaches out his hand to steady it, the way you would a baby's pram. But it's not a baby's pram, it's the ark of the covenant. This is actually an irreverent act on Uzzah's part. It's not his place to protect God. God is there to protect him. In fact the major issue is that neither Uzzah, nor, as it turns out, David, seem to comprehend the nature, the holiness of the God they profess to worship. And it's this holiness of God that is bothering David the most.

The questions that need to be asked are:

- Is David doing the right thing
- is he doing it at the right time,
- and is he doing it in the right way?

When you compare this action of David in bringing the ark to Jerusalem, with other actions he has taken in the past, there is a big significant difference. That is - where have we heard that David sought God's direction for doing what he was doing?

In his military exploits, David has come before God in prayer and sought out his guidance and will. David has submitted to God. But in this? There is absolutely no evidence of that. David has decided himself that this is what he wants to do.

And as a result, Uzzah is dead.

David now wonders whether it's safe to take the Ark into Jerusalem at all?

What if something terrible happens in the middle of the city of David.

What if some plague breaks out like it did when the Ark was taken into those Philistine cities?

Perhaps part of his anger is that he's no longer sure whether he can trust the LORD, whether the LORD is safe to be near. In fact there's something a bit superstitious about his response isn't there?

It seems that David wants a God who is predictable.

More than predictable, he wants a God who follows rules that he's happy with.

That's the problem that most humans have isn't it?

We want God to obey our rules, to behave in ways that we think are fair and reasonable.

We get a bit jumpy when God acts as though he can do what he likes!

But that in fact is exactly what God can do.

I'm reminded of the scene in "The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe," when Mr & Mrs Beaver are telling the children about Aslan. Let me read you what happens:

*"Is--is he a man?" asked Lucy.*

*"Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion--the Lion, the great Lion."*

*"Ooh!" said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he--quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."*

*"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."*

*"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.*

*"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe?"*

*"Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King I tell you."*

So David decides to leave the Ark of the Covenant behind, with a man from Gath, who isn't afraid to have the ark stay in his home.

And he discovers that God is indeed good to those who receive him gladly. God blesses this man and his whole household, which David subsequently hears about and decides that he should bring the ark into Jerusalem after all.

And this time, it's different.

We discover in the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 15 that he actually takes the Levites to carry it in. And not only do they sing and dance as it makes its way to the city, but this time they sacrifice as they go.

## Listen to 1 Chronicles 15

*<sup>11</sup> Then David summoned Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel and Amminadab the Levites. <sup>12</sup> He said to them, "You are the heads of the Levitical families; you and your fellow Levites are to consecrate yourselves and bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel, to the place I have prepared for it. <sup>13</sup> It was because you, the Levites, did not bring it up the first time that the Lord our God broke out in anger against us. We did not inquire of him about how to do it in the prescribed way." <sup>14</sup> So the priests and Levites consecrated themselves in order to bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel. <sup>15</sup> And the Levites carried the ark of God with the poles on their shoulders, as Moses had commanded in accordance with the word of the Lord.*

The New International Version. (2011). (1 Ch 15:11–15). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

David realised what he had done wrong. He corrected it and they enter the city with dancing and singing and there in the lead is David, dancing for all he's worth.

David gets it right. He burns multiple sacrifices, showing his worship and allegiance to his God, and he honours the people God has given him by blessing them with a feast. He gives everyone their evening meal - entree, main and dessert. And the people go home, after a great day.

But his exuberance is not appreciated by everyone, least of all his wife, Michal.

David goes home planning to bless his household, and he meets a less than happy wife. Remember that Michal is Saul's daughter, his first wife, and she's not impressed at all.

He comes in the door full of the excitement of the day, and what does he find? His wife looking daggers at him.

It seems this display of enthusiasm by David is embarrassing to her. He's making such a fool of himself! What sort of a king is it who makes a public spectacle of himself in this way? She feels humiliated by the behaviour of her husband, and it may be that she finds it so abhorrent because her father, King Saul, would never have done anything like that, in her mind!!

It's also possible that this is a further insult to her, remembering that David had taken other wives as well.

But notice what David has to say about this.

He's not worried about what others think. He's worried about what the Lord thinks of him.

He isn't going to be the sort of King that Saul was. He will gladly make himself a fool for God's sake. And he's going to humble himself before the LORD.

We need to remember that David's learnt a lot about God lately.

He's learnt that God isn't safe. God is so much greater than any human king.

He's learnt that God is good. That God can be trusted. And God is the one whose opinion he needs to worry about.

On first reading this chapter ends very oddly.

This marital disharmony is permanent. It is likely that David and Michal never have sex again. Michal remains childless to her death.

What this does is bring to a close any linkage with Saul for all time. Saul's kingship is at an end.

Any offspring that David has, have no bloodline to Saul at all. No child of David could now claim the throne because of a connection with Saul.

And this paves the way for a new covenant, which is to come - God's covenant with David. That's Chapter 7.

Now I do just want to come to the point of saying, what does this teach us about Jesus?  
Uzzah thought that he could touch the ark of the covenant. But it was not for him to do that.  
He was unsuitable for that role.

We have, in Jesus, the one who IS suitable.

The one who fulfils all the requirements that the Lord has for being the one who mediates. For being the one who reaches out to us, so that we can reach out to God.

It is in Jesus that we find the one who brings us into that relationship.,

The covenant with David, which we will hear about next week, this new covenant, the one that will last forever and eventually lead to Jesus.

The dynasty that God has in mind for David ends with the Messiah, our King, our Redeemer, our Lord.  
Amen.