Church of the Nativity

Grand Junction, CO

Date: July 15, 2018

Preacher: Rev. Blaine Scott

Title: Praying Hands and Dirty Fingernails

Text: 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19

Theme: What “offerings of well-being” can you offer the Lord? The inward spiritual life and the outward acts of compassion are part of being a whole Christian.

**2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19**

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.

They brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the Lord. When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts, and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Allow me to set the table before the main course is offered: Years of fighting and drama have been occurring in Israel between Saul’s people and David’s people. And the Philistines were battling both at different times.

King Saul has recently been killed in battle and Israel has no king.

David is in his early 30’s when word gets to him that Saul has died. The crown passes on to David who then proceeds to conquer Saul’s followers.

Then, newly appointed King David, conquers the inhabitants of Jerusalem and calls it the City of David. With the Lord’s blessing and support, David now prepares to show the world how the Lord God Almighty reigns and blesses God’s people. David sets in motion, numerous complex arrangements to move the Ark of the Covenant out of hiding in a private location up to a new Tabernacle Tent in the city of David. And, he plans to do so, not in secret surrounded by special- forces soldiers, but in public with 30,000 men and citizens participating.

The Ark of the Covenant is the most powerful symbol - and sign of the living God’s continuing presence with Israel. It is said to contain both sets of stone tablets in which the Ten Commandments were forged. The first set were inscribed by God’s own touch. But Moses threw them down in disgust at Israel’s disobedient acts, and the tablets broke. The second set of two stone tablets were inscribed by Moses.

The Ark itself was made by specific instructions from the Lord. Therefore, both the Ark and its contents were irreplaceable invaluable symbols of God’s presence in the lives of the people.

The table is set, and the Ark of the Covenant is the center piece.

Now, the main course.

In an extravagant display of joyful celebration and dominating power, King David and the Israelites marched in a grand parade from the Ark’s previous hiding place up the hill, through the great wall of Jerusalem, and to the temporary tent abode. Later, a more stately temple and inner sanctum would be built of course.

As the Ark advanced to its new domicile, David danced before the Lord with all of his might as an expression of worship and praise for all to see.

What is your Ark? What is the meaningful symbol(s) of God’s presence in your life?

A particular cross, a family bible, a ring? How does bringing that symbol to mind inspire you to give God worship and praise?

Unfortunately, godly symbols do not possess the power, in and of themselves, to sustain our transformed life – any more than the Ark of the Covenant could keep Israel from disobeying God and straying from God’s will.

The symbols remind us of a transformation and right relationship with God at some point in the past. Yet they hold little power to sustain that relationship in the present.

Think of it as a cornucopia symbol at Thanksgiving time. Just by bringing a cornucopia to our conscious awareness, its easy to smell the fragrant food, hear the family conversations and laughter. It reminds us of past family and faith celebrations. Yet a cornucopia does little to nourish us in the off season and in unawareness.

Instead, genuine regular worship and praise of God do sustain our spiritual relationship, serving to deepen our intimacy with the Holy. And relevantly nurture us in the present time.

As a United Methodist clergy, I appreciate the similar roots of Methodists and Episcopalians in the Church of England.

John Wesley, growing up in a priest’s household, came to live out his faith through acts of piety and acts of mercy: acts of piety had to do with the practices of prayer, worship, receiving the sacraments, fasting, and belonging to a society of Christians holding one another accountable for our growth in the knowledge and love of God. Through such practices, we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in our own growth in grace. By these means we open ourselves to the spiritual life and stay connected to Christ and to one another. Acts of piety convert the heart, turn us daily toward God, and help us receive the life restoring work of God’s grace through the Holy Spirit. Acts of piety feed our relationship with God.

Now, what is a Thanksgiving Feast if you are the only one at the table, sitting by yourself, surrounded by an abundance of food? Certainly you are nourished, but where is the joy of fellowship, of service in the name of the Lord?

Immediately after the Ark is set into place within its new home, the bible states

“He blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts, and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins.”

This kind of reminds us of someone 1,000 years later in David’s lineage who would stand on a Mount and teach the multitudes, and the generously feed them.

Now that’s fellowship! Just imagine the complex planning and support that it took to distribute food to the multitudes! Yet David did not forget the people in the midst of his ecstatic worship.

Generously sharing offerings of well-being to the multitudes are tokens of David’s joy and gratitude to God. When the heart is enlarged in joy, the hand is opened in mercy.

James, one of Jesus’ disciples writes, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.” (James 2: 14-18)

In response to God giving and sustaining our very lives, we are called to a deeply intimate relationship with God that is expressed through our actions in God’s world.

Martyn Atkins of Britain writes, “Acts of piety and acts of mercy are like two wings of a bird; without either one, we cannot fly.” There is no simple dualism. We can’t evangelize hungry people without giving them food, and offering food alone never completes the task God gives us. Atkins goes on to say, “Following Christ involves praying hands and dirty fingernails.”

Wesley’s Acts of mercy are ministries of compassion, service, and justice that relieve suffering, feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned and heal the sick. These we do in obedience to Christ. We serve others for the purposes of Christ. These are the personal and daily acts of service, kindness, and sacrifice that improve the conditions of life for our neighbors. In wider measure, acts of mercy include our social witness and advocacy, our work for justice and peace, and our support of systems that protect the vulnerable and relieve suffering.

Praying hands and dirty fingernails help to bring our spirituality out of hiding from enemies or the world, and restores the image of God within us.

And if God is restoring us into his image then he would be restoring us to be more loving to our neighbors, giving us a heart of compassion, charity and mercy so that we would look at the world and see the brokenness, hurts and needs, and we would seek to address these needs as God’s instruments.

It is foundational biblical Christianity fulfilling the greatest commandments to love God and neighbor. Summarized as:

1) Do love God. 2) Do no harm. 3) Do the good.

To summarize, Wes Granberg-Michaelson writes,

Our spiritual journey involves inward and outward transformation—the simultaneous, continuing transformation of the inward hearts of people liberated by God’s astonishing grace and the outward transformation of social and economic structures liberated by God’s standards of justice.

This is a spiritual journey which connects us intrinsically to the presence of God, whose love yearns to save and transform the world. We are called to be “in Christ,” which means we share—always imperfectly, and always in community with others—the call to be the embodiment of God’s love in the world that God so loves. . . .