

2 Samuel 6:1-5; 12-19 The Message (MSG)

¹⁻² David mustered the pick of the troops of Israel—thirty divisions of them. Together with his soldiers, David headed for Baalah to recover the Chest of God, which was called by the Name God-of-the-Angel-Armies, who was enthroned over the pair of angels on the Chest.

³⁻⁷ They placed the Chest of God on a brand-new oxcart and removed it from Abinadab's house on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, Abinadab's sons, were driving the new cart loaded with the Chest of God, Ahio in the lead and Uzzah alongside the Chest. David and the whole company of Israel were in the parade, singing at the top of their lungs and playing mandolins, harps, tambourines, castanets, and cymbals.

¹²⁻¹⁶ It was reported to King David that God had prospered Obed-Edom and his entire household because of the Chest of God. So David thought, "I'll get that blessing for myself," and went and brought up the Chest of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David, celebrating extravagantly all the way, with frequent sacrifices of choice bulls. David, ceremonially dressed in priest's linen, danced with great abandon before God. The whole country was with him as he accompanied the Chest of God with shouts and trumpet blasts. But as the Chest of God came into the City of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, happened to be looking out a window. When she saw King David leaping and dancing before God, her heart filled with scorn.

¹⁷⁻¹⁹ They brought the Chest of God and set it in the middle of the tent pavilion that David had pitched for it. Then and there David worshiped, offering burnt offerings and peace offerings. When David had completed the sacrifices of burnt and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of God-of-the-Angel-Armies and handed out to each person in the crowd, men and women alike, a loaf of bread, a date cake, and a raisin cake. Then everyone went home.

Ephesians 1:3-14 The Message (MSG)

³⁻⁶ How blessed is God! And what a blessing God is! God is the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.

⁷⁻¹⁰ Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free! He thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans he took such delight in making. He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.

¹¹⁻¹² It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.

¹³⁻¹⁴It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This signet from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.

“Exuberant Children”
The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee
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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Whatever shall I wear!? It may be that this was the only question that David's wife Michal had in mind when her husband, with his troops, returns the Ark to Jerusalem. Given the era, we can imagine that the wife of the exultant ruler might have had nothing more on her mind than a celebratory party. Clearly, David had been considering his own wardrobe, since he had made sure to don his ceremonial ephod, marking him as a servant of the Lord as well as King.

As you know, I have been on vacation, and though it isn't always the case, celebratory parties were a significant part of my time away. The reasons for them are far-ranging and the people involved represent a wide swath of my entire life. Choosing what clothing to pack, amusingly enough, was a particular problem. We've all heard about the dreadful heat waves throughout the west, even as our own temperatures fluctuate between very cold, damp days and the kind of July in Maine we all wait for. I packed for heat, rather than garb particularly suited for the 95th birthday party of our dear family friend and father figure to me in Delta, CO. Weather predictions are as inconsistently accurate in Delta as here in Blue Hill, though, so I didn't have *just the thing to wear* at any time. Ah well, our party was about honoring someone we loved and not so much about what anyone was wearing. The one party for which I had flown out was really only one among many that spanned the week I was there, with lots of board games in the evening,

viewing of sunrises and sunsets—more of the latter—and long conversations and bike rides with the people who know me best.

Why share all this about my own vacation while considering David and others revelry? Not everyone at either party was entirely happy to be there, and not everyone felt celebratory. Until fairly recently, I had always read very quickly past Michal's name, only briefly wondering why Saul's daughter was a party pooper. I mean, why wasn't she just as excited as the rest of the people to have the Ark of the Covenant brought to Jerusalem, her father's own sacred city? Learning more about Michal, though, we may have a better understanding of the party dynamics as well as of her ongoing relationship with David. Her scorn wasn't so much about his dancing, nor was it really about his attire. Somehow, the latter is the focus of much discussion, with many believing that David was dancing *only* in linen undergarments, rather than dancing in full clothing that *included* this clothing whose importance is more symbolic for his piety than his royalty. Michal, looking out at the revelry from behind a window, had other reasons for being upset. You see, she wasn't only Saul's daughter, as such a former king's offspring. She was David's wife. And while we might understand her dismay and even her criticism if his frivolity included some state of disrobing, her concerns were deeper still. You see, she had loved David from the moment she first saw him as a young man. But as a woman in the household of the man, David, she had little value. Earlier in the story of their relationship, of their marriage, she had been a familiar political pawn in her father's and David's plans, and so they had been married in order to unite the families. Later, when it suited her father Saul, she had been sent away to become the consort of Palti, son of Laish. It is only much later that David had brought her back into his own home, after she had been living as wife to Palti, a man who loved her as deeply as she had previously loved David. So, you see, Michal had good reason not to enjoy David's revelry.

We may keep Michal's experiences in mind this morning as we consider our own desire to celebrate in our worshipful praise. We have arrived at this moment from different places and in different moods. As many members gathered in one body for worship, we also have varied church backgrounds. Some of us come from a life of no connection to church or worship at all. Some of us might rather distinctly be identified as among what are often called "the frozen chosen," the New England types for whom an "Amen!" Or a "Hallelujah!" Make us shiver with distaste or with a kind of fear. For some, worship should be an affair noted by its solemnity and seriousness. For others of us, though, boy do we miss singing! Boy, have we missed the heightened energy that comes from gathering *together* in the way we are this morning, drawn together for a common purpose with the goal of changing our lives for the better. Remember, though, that we did not all arrive in the same mood, nor do we leave here to return to the same environments. For some of us, this hour or so of worship followed by a time of fellowship is only a temporary respite from a life that is challenging us—for some by grief or sadness of another kind; for some by relationships that may look good on the outside but may have echoes of Michal's experiences on the inside. Still, we are here together, for worship.

And whatever does that mean? Why do we worship? What is the church for? We can ask ourselves this morning what David the shepherd king teaches us, and Paul, too. While we may well fault David for his unfaithfulness in human relationships, we also know that—in the fullness of time—David comes to know the ways in which he has sinned and makes amends for his past failings. What we never question entirely is the way he responds to God's call in his life, and David's worship in the story we read for this morning may be a lesson for how *we also may worship*—joyfully, even ecstatically. David danced, and the people with him.

Katherine Huey, who is the former pastor of the UCC's Amistad Chapel, reflected on this morning's passage in a way that may help you also to consider the way in which *you* respond to God.

“When we compare our faith and our ritual with that of ancient Israel, does it seem that we have tried to ‘tame’ God? Who is God for you? Is God a nice, friendly companion who comforts us and offers us a reward for our good behavior and our regular attendance at church? Or is this God of David and the people of Israel more likely the terrifying God of Annie Dillard, the remarkable American author, who famously wrote, ‘Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?....It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews’ (“Teaching a Stone to Talk”). . . . This is not so much the fearful image of a punishing God, though, as it is an attempt to convey the people's ancient understanding of God's awesome *otherness*, God's transcendent power and glory. It is oddly comforting, in a very different way from the tamed and domesticated Comforter-God, that the universe is not spinning wildly out of control but is in the hands of a God so much greater than our imaginations (which are pretty powerful engines in their own right, if we would only use them).”

This brings us back to Paul's letter, in a way. Isn't it most comforting to know that God has adopted us as God's own children—wanting for us all good things, beginning with God's love? Yes, we need our crash helmets, because the power of God is greater than we can begin to imagine. Still, we are invited to imagine it. We are invited to worship God in all God's glory and power, and also to recognize that we are asked to be a part of it, through Jesus Christ. When life throws us challenges, and when life throws us the greatest of joys and blessings, like a new child, and like long and healthy marriage, or like 95 years of life, we are invited to

worship God with our gratitude for God's presence with us. God even provides the crash helmet—Jesus walks with us. And Jesus has provided us with a crash helmet, as well. We have the church, where we first and foremost give our thanks and praise to God, and also where we unite as loving family to walk together as Jesus walks with us. As church, we read Paul's letter as an invitation into a space of humble value as God's children, and as invitation to a place of praise and thanksgiving. The story of David's utter glee and dancing response begins with praise and thanksgiving, in a way, and moves us to ask why. What will it take for us to be that religious. Yes, I said that religious---about dancing in response to God's love. No, that's not for everyone and certainly not at all times. We have Michal with us; we have Jonathan and Saul and we have Annie and Kate. For some of us, the most profound moment of the entire worship service is the silence that comes before the pastoral prayer. We are different people with different stories and with different needs. Still, we know that what God wants for us ultimately is a the life of joy that Gene Peterson describes in the translation of scripture we read this morning: ¹¹⁻¹²It's in Christ *that we find out who we are and what we are living for.*” God has “designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose God is working out in everything and everyone.”

We have heard the truth: the Holy Spirit is present with us, binding us together and reminding us of all that we have to look forward to eternally, as well. And for now? A dancing, praising and glorious life when we respond to our gifts in thanksgiving. Amen.