

Wednesday April 11, 2007
7:00am Holy Communion

2 Samuel 6:1-15

And David gathered again all the picked men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose and went, and all the troops who were with him, to Baalah in Judah to bring up from there the Ark of God, over which the name of the LORD of Hosts enthroned on the cherubim is called. And they mounted the Ark of God on a new cart and carried it off from the house of Abinadab, which is on the Hill, and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the cart, and Ahio was walking before the Ark. And David and the whole house of Israel were playing before the LORD with all their might in song on lyres and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. And they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, and Uzzah reached out to the Ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen had slipped. And the LORD'S wrath flared up against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for reaching out his hand to the Ark, and he died there by the Ark of God. And David was incensed because the LORD had burst out against Uzzah. And that place has been called Perez-uzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the Lord on that day and he said, "How can the

Ark of the LORD come to me?” And David did not want to remove the Ark of the LORD to himself in the City of David, and David had it turned aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite.

And the Ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-edom three months and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his house. And it was told to King David saying, “The LORD has blessed the house of Obed-edom and all that he has on account of the Ark of God.” And David went and brought up the Ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the City of David with rejoicing.

And it happened when the bearers of the Ark of the LORD had taken six steps that he sacrificed a fatted bull. And David was whirling with all his might before the LORD, girt in a linen ephod. And David and the whole house of Israel were bringing up the Ark of the Lord in shouts and with the sound of the ram’s horn.

From The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel by Robert Alter.

We're a little more respectful—we're more careful with the frying pan, we're aware of the danger of falling off of the bike, we don't touch the Ark—and we rejoice in the new joy we have—dinner is served and no one got hurt this time, you get to ride everywhere with your friends, David whirls with all of this might before the Lord, and with the whole house of Israel shouts for joy and blows the Ram's horn.

Handle God with care, but keep handling God. Amen

Homily by The Rev Timothy A Leitzke

Uzzah is that most pitiable of characters. He is created in verse three to carry the new cart that holds the Ark, and he's killed in verse seven for touching the Ark. That is the length of his literary existence. As if that wasn't pitiable enough, we learn that it was God who struck him dead. How can this be?

Some would suggest that this story isn't really about God, but some other capricious deity. Others wouldn't go that far, but would insist that these kinds of stories are best left ignored. That's a common tactic for difficult bible stories, especially in the Old Testament. Unfortunately for those who wish to take that route it was judged as heresy a very long time ago.

Some would suggest that Uzzah lacks faith, and that is the reason for his demise. He reaches out to catch the Ark so that it does not fall to the ground. Instead, he should have had faith that the Ark would be okay. It's a clever idea, but not a sufficient explanation.

You see, Uzzah should have known better. In the preceding narrative we learn that the Ark has a history of deadliness. It is not something to be taken lightly. Uzzah

should have known not to touch it. The Ark is kind of like a hot frying pan overfull of ground beef, and you try really hard to keep it all in the pan while you're stirring and turning it and some is at the edge and you just reach up with your fingers to keep it in the pan and get a painful reminder of why we don't touch hot frying pans.

More importantly, this is for us a *story*, and not necessarily a *history*. The storyteller writes this story to teach us that the Ark, the throne of God, is not to be taken lightly. King David is carrying it to his new capital in Jerusalem in order to legitimize it and his new reign over Israel and Judah. That's not meant cynically. God clearly endorses David and loves him and the people he rules. It's just that God remains something other, something holy, and something that will not be contained by any human designs.

Human designs put God in a box or, in a story more familiar to us, a hole. Humans shoved Jesus in a hole on Good Friday, and blocked the opening with a huge stone. God cannot be contained, even by the grave. Jesus burst out of the tomb a lot like God burst out against Uzzah. The lesson common to both stories is, "Do not take God lightly." Phrased in the words of Psalm 111, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." It is the beginning; Friends of Christ,

it is not the end. God wants fear and respect; God still wants to be close.

After Uzzah dies, David is afraid and stashes the Ark at someone else's house. This guy, Obed-edom, treats the Ark with respect and God blesses him and his house. Seeing that, David decides that having the Ark at his house might not be that bad after all.

I think of my learning to ride a bicycle. I took a long time. I had terrible trouble learning, and I grew ashamed of the training wheels, so for months at a time I would stash the bike in the utility room. I finally got rid of the training wheels, but then the falling began. By the third attempt of the evening I would have scraped or bruised myself and quit. The other kids were having too much fun, though. The bikes were blessings to them. So, I sucked it up and took my scrapes and bruises and kept going and finally mastered it.

That power of God to burst all of the bonds we might put on God and that immeasurable holiness—difference from us—are scary, but they are too good to pass up. We suck it up and take our scrapes and bruises because knowing the risen Christ is just too good not to do, and what once was frightening to us is now our cause for joy and celebration.