

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

**“Celebrating God”**

The Rev. Dr. Jean Halligan Vandergrift

Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Roslindale, MA

“Giving Thanks Sunday” - Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, November 21, 2021

*The Reading:*

*After God led David and the Israelites to victory over the Philistines, David took troops with him to escort the Ark of God into Jerusalem. David led the parade, and the whole company of Israel sang at the top of their lungs, playing mandolins, harps, tambourines, castanets, and cymbals.*

*They had a long way to go and made stops along the way. As they traveled, the people celebrated extravagantly, frequently sacrificing 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 Ark of God with shouts and trumpet blasts. But as the Ark of God came into the City of David, Michal, Saul's daughter and David's wife, happened to be looking out a window. When she saw King David leaping and dancing before God, her heart filled with scorn.*

*They brought the Ark 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. He also blessed the people in the name of the Lord God 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.*

**This morning, I invite you to say aloud what you remember, if anything, about David and his story...** *(Jean will field congregant responses and write them on the newsprint.)*

All this and more represents David's legacy for us as people of faith, but I am going to focus on the story Caroline read: David ushering the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. **What was David dancing about?**

Well, he had several things to celebrate: the victory of Israel over the Philistines, his own physical prowess and popularity, and the way that this parade helped consolidate the country – bringing together the traditionalists, including those still loyal to Saul the first King, and those in favor of his new generation of leadership.

At the same time, there are things going on in this story that are *not* worth celebrating. One is the violence and death associated with Israel's long-enduring war with Philistine. Another is how the story treats Michal, David's wife and King Saul's daughter. Granted, she despised David for dancing, which seems petty, but I also see in the story how much sexism was stacked against her in Israelite society and its religion at

that time!<sup>1</sup> I also cannot celebrate the probability that David was using the holy Ark – the presence of God – for his own political ends.

**Today, we have several things to celebrate and dance about too.** We are receiving financial pledges for 2022, and the total that we collect will undergird valuable ministry and nurture commitment to the future that can result! So far, COVID infections have stayed at bay for our congregation! At the same time, public health in our society and during this crisis faces tremendous inequities and needs reform.

We're also coming into the Thanksgiving holiday, which is a 'mixed bag' in terms of what we celebrate. In the background of the sanitized story of the Pilgrims and indigenous peoples sharing a feast, there is an ugly racism against Native Americans that endures. So what are we celebrating? Yet, just this week, I read how, at our Synod, the UCC adopted a resolution called "the movement toward racial justice," as we answer God's call to be an anti-racist church. This means that at RCC we now have the opportunity to draw upon additional denominational resources and a collective declaration in our own quest to grow in *anti-racism* awareness and action here locally! This is something to celebrate.

Henri Nouwen ably speaks to the dilemma of celebrating when there is still so much suffering and hurt to address. He writes, "Any dance of celebration must weave both the sorrows and the blessing into a joyful step. To heal is to let the Holy Spirit call [us] to dance, to believe again, even amid [our] pain, that God will orchestrate and guide [our] life."<sup>2</sup>

So, it remains a discernment dilemma for sure: how should we celebrate as the church when there is so much that remains counter to God's will in the world?

What I think that we can affirm out of David's legacy in this story that one of the redeeming qualities of this complex man was his genuine reverence for and connection to God. David did not practice a spirituality that dichotomized his mind from the rest of his body, or the soul from the rest of society. David danced "with all his might," one of the versions puts it. We, too, ought to name the positive points where we see God at work and do so publicly, as well as pointing out where we fall short of God's will – thereby, loving God with our whole selves, mind, body, spirit, tambourines and castanets! Like him, the church should rejoice in our connection to the Divine. **What I take from this story is that celebrating God in our midst is a worthy practice that supports the future with hope that God has promised.**

Last weekend at my nephew's wedding, he danced with his mother, my sister, to a lovely country music song, that sounds to me like the Holy Spirit's invitation:

"I hope you never lose your sense of wonder,  
You get your fill to eat but always keep that hunger.  
May you never take one single breath for granted.  
God forbid love ever leave you empty-handed.  
I hope you still feel small when you stand beside the ocean.

---

<sup>1</sup>Bruce C. Birch, "The First and Second Books of Samuel," *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. II*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1250-52.

<sup>2</sup>Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Turn My Mourning into Dancing: Finding Hope in Hard Times* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004).

Whenever one door closes, I hope one more opens.  
Promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance,  
And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance.  
I hope you dance. I hope you dance.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Lee Ann Womack, Sons of the Desert, “I Hope You Dance.”