

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**2-Narrative 07 – David and the Ark
2 Samuel 5:1-5; 6:1-5; Psalm 150 (Mark 11:8-10)**

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“Power, Love and Joy”

David had a big decision to make, and it was hard because his heart told him one thing and his head, another. He was torn between his desire to take a leap of faith and dare to do something dangerous – what he felt in his heart God was calling him to do – and his desire to take the rational and reasonable road, play it safe, leave well enough alone.

It had to do with the ark of the covenant, the most exquisite thing David had ever seen, a wooden chest that had been ornately carved and then completely encased in gold. It seemed to glow – but it wasn't just the gold reflecting the light – it seemed to have an inner radiance. You could feel something in the air as you approached – like that prickly charge just before a storm. And was it any wonder? For in that ark were Aaron's rod, a jar of manna, and the 2 tablets of the Decalogue. And it wasn't just those sacred items that exuded power. It was the very presence of God's own self. Not that you could confine God to a box! God was everywhere and in everything but somehow there was a concentrated presence of God in that ark that was like fire and lightning and wind. It had accompanied God's people in the wilderness for 40 years. It had caused the walls of Jericho to fall so they could enter the promised land! It had given them victories until that time not so long ago when it had been captured by the Philistines. The Philistines had wanted YHWH's power – but it didn't turn out to be the kind of power they had desired, for everywhere they took the ark, calamity followed.

In 1 place people developed tumors, in another a plague of mice, & in yet another everyone broke out in boils. Finally the Philistines returned the ark, but as the Israelites were transporting it over rocky ground, it had begun to rock in the cart, and one of the drivers, poor Uzzah, had touched it just to steady it and he had been zapped as surely as if lightning had struck him and had fallen down dead.

It was at that point that David began to question whether he really wanted to be that close to God's power, and he put the ark in storage – hidden away, far away.

David certainly knew God loved him. How could he not?

God had been the one who had sought him out when he was only 10 years old & anointed him King of Israel.

God had arranged for him to be summoned to the palace when he was just 16 to play music for King Saul.

By the time he was 25 he was commanding 1000 soldiers.

And for all those years David had felt God's love and David had loved God in return.

Yes, he had spent 5 years in bloody battles, fleeing from King Saul's paranoia, but God had brought him through those tough times as well.

Now he was not only king of the two southern tribes, but of the 10 northern tribes as well.

He had captured Jerusalem which would be the new capital city, the city of Zion, the city of God. And it was all good.

The thing was he had this vision of bringing the ark to Jerusalem

so that Jerusalem would not only be the political & civil center of the land, but the religious center as well.

He felt in his heart that God should be at the center,

but the ark had caused such devastation & destruction for the Philistines & for Uzzah that he was afraid.

Things were fine now. The kingdom was re-united, the capital city being prepared & it was a time of peace & prosperity.

They were doing fine with the ark where it was – out of sight, out of mind, out where it could not cause trouble.

His head told him to leave it there.

If he brought it to Jerusalem someone else might die, someone he loved, maybe even himself.

If he brought it to Jerusalem it could bring plagues upon the city.

If he brought it to Jerusalem, it might change things in ways he could never anticipate.

Did he really and truly want God's power in his life?

If it was power he could control that was one thing, but this power, God's power, divine power, could not be controlled.

God's power could be scary

because God's power might shake things up, turn things upside down, wrench away human control.

His head said leave it where it is, don't invite it in, don't let it into your life.

But his heart said, "It's God. It's the God who loves me. It's the God I love.

And God wants to be in the center of my heart, my life, my work, my people, my country."

And so, after watching and waiting for three long months, David went with his heart, and brought the ark to Jerusalem, trusting in God's love and putting God's power at the center.

You and I, as Lutherans, know God's love.

It's what we teach, it's what we preach, it's what we proclaim.

Justification by grace through faith is our creed and cry, our most basic belief, our watchword.

We bask in God's love, we glory in God's grace, we find comfort in the arms of God's mercy.

We talk A LOT about God's love; but we don't talk much about God's power.

At last week's Sunday Night Alive, we watched the film, "Indescribable"

& saw pictures not only of the earth from outer space, but of the sun, other planets, solar systems, galaxies.

We saw pictures of the grandeur and greatness of this vast universe

and we reflected on the great and glorious God who is the source and ground of it all.

Afterwards we talked about the vastness of the universe that is inside each of us,

in our flesh and bones, our muscles and organs, our blood and brain.

We talked about cells and DNA, and atoms, and protons and neutrons and electrons, and subatomic particles.

One need only reflect on our indescribable universe to realize the indescribable power of God.

If we believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we recognize the amazing power of God.

If we look back on church history & see how a few ordinary fisherman & tax collectors from a tiny country turned the world upside down and led us here today 2000 years later,

we understand that we are here as a result of the phenomenal power of God.

But in our own individual lives, do we really believe God can work miracles?

Do we really believe God is at work in personal, powerful ways?

Do we really believe God has power in our lives –

to change our health, our economic prospects, our relationships, our life situations?

And if we do believe God can, do we believe God will?

I don't think that most of my Lutheran mentors in the faith really believed in God's power

because I was taught not to expect too much from prayer.

Oh, it was OK to pray, "Oh, God, please – I would really like such and such",

but no sooner than that desire, that wish, that prayer was out of my mouth, I'd follow it with

"but if that's not what you want than that's fine. I understand. You know best."

Now there's nothing wrong with the words of that prayer – Jesus said much the same thing in Gethsemane – but the underlying feeling was not faith, but doubt,

because no sooner would I pray for something than I was saying I was OK with things as they were.

Maybe it was because I didn't really expect things to change or maybe I really didn't want them to.

I remember hearing a sermon at an Easter sunrise service that talked about God's power

and the fact that if God had the power to raise Jesus from the dead,

then surely God has the power to act directly and specifically and powerfully in our lives today.

I was suffering from migraines at the time.

I got bad migraines frequently and they would last for days and I would be incapacitated.

So I went home after that sermon and I threw my migraine medicine in the trashcan.

Later that day I dug the medicine back out of the trashcan.

I buried it away in my basement so it wouldn't be nearby in my medicine cabinet,

but it was still in my house if I needed it.

I wasn't really sure that God could heal me. I wanted to believe, but along with that belief I had doubts.

Now I know that if you have as many doubts as you have beliefs, you're only going to attract mixed results.

So that Monday I was in the shower and I was reflecting on my desire and my doubt, my faith and my fear, when all of a sudden I heard God say, "Do you WANT to be healed or not?"

Immediately I wondered, "Do I? If I don't get migraines, I won't have an excuse to stay in bed..."

That thought completely shocked me.

I had never realized that while part of me wanted to be healed,

there was another part that had grown accustomed to being sick

and the sickness was actually giving me something I wanted.

Well, I decided then and there that yes, I did want to be healed, and I was – 99%.

God has the power to do so much more in each of our lives than we can ever even imagine.

It's not God who limits us; it is we who limit God.

Every dream, every desire, every vision that we have in our hearts has been placed there by God.

Even if it seems like an unholy, unhealthy desire on the surface – like lust for someone else's spouse – underneath that desire is a more basic, more holy one – “I want to love and be loved”.

God knows what we're looking for; God knows what we crave; God knows what we need.

God has the power to bring us from where we are to where we need to go,

but like David we need to take that leap of faith to do the risky things that God calls us to do and to hold onto faith in the midst of doubt.

The God of all creation,

the God who breathed life into you,

the God who graces use with every beat of your heart and every breath of your lungs,

the God who knows every thought in your head,

that God can do anything God wants to do.

God wants to fulfill the desires God has placed in your heart,

God wants to bring you to a place where you will be more fulfilled than you've ever been,

God wants you to live into the potential God has placed within you.

God wants you to not only experience God's love but God's power.

In the end, David listened not to his head, but to his heart.

David did what God wanted him to do.

He put God – with all of God's life-changing power – in the center –

in the center of his life, his work, his family, his faith, his country, his world.

When David opened himself to God's power, he came to know God's love on a whole new level.

And that overwhelming love that he felt moved him to put every other thought out of his head but one – how much he loved this God who loved him.

Abandoning all sense of decorum, he threw off half his clothes and leaped and danced

and sang and celebrated, praising God with all his heart and soul and body and mind,

with songs, harps, lyres, tambourines, rattles, and cymbals.

When David opened his life to God's power, he knew God's love, and his heart was filled with joy.

May you believe in God's power and trust in God's love, and may your heart, too, overflow with joy. **Amen**