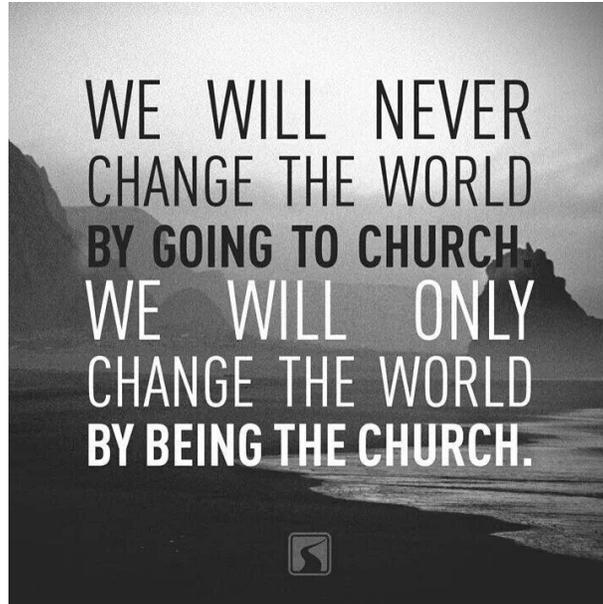


[2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19; Psalm 24 ; Mark 6:14-29](#)



Change and God's presence

The best text that I received this week was from Christina Talbot Clark, who puts together our service bulletins for us. She wrote: "The readings for this week involve Michal being angry at David for dancing before the Lord, and the beheading of John the Baptist. Good luck"

Let's just limit ourselves to David, dancing, and the Ark this morning.

The Hebrew Scripture reading, from the biblical book of 2 Samuel, shows David, the shepherd and King of Israel organizing the procession of the Ark of the Covenant¹ into its new home in Jerusalem, the "City of David.". The Ark of the Covenant, also called the "Ark of God" was the premiere holy item of ancient Israel, a wooden box about four feet long by two and a half feet wide, gilded with gold. Its cover or lid was called "the mercy seat" and it represented the presence or dwelling place of God amongst the people. It was carried in procession by the Israelites during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. The New Testament Book of Hebrews² described it as containing the two stone tablets of the "ten commandments", the staff of Aaron's that budded, and manna from the wilderness.

¹ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ark_of_the_Covenant

² Hebrew 9:4

2

Always covered by a veil, and placed in a tent called the tabernacle, it functioned as a window into God and a sign that pointed beyond itself to God's nearness and glory. It was a sacred and steadfast reminder to the people that God was with them, always, wherever they might go.

As the ark came into the city, David removed his kingly robes and put on the simple coverings of a priest, and joyfully and unabashedly danced in the procession, greatly disturbing his wife Michal, who likely considered it undignified.

Its worth noting here, that the story of David and Michal makes the modern-day Kardashians look like fourth rate rank amateurs. David had many wives, the Bible only lists eight by name, and Michal, the daughter of the former King Saul, was only one of them. During the course of their relationship, Michal was "traded" by David and the rulers back and forth to other husbands, as one might trade objects of livestock, and the relationship between her and David was full of drama, waaaay beyond what today's Facebook relationship status would now refer to as "it's complicated." You can find much of the story in the Books of First and Second Samuel.

So I have been thinking these past weeks about this Ark of the Covenant and its journeys, because we, like the ancient Israelites, have been wandering in the wilderness of a worldwide pandemic for seventeen months now. If you can even think back, to what seems like a lifetime ago to early 2020, our Lenten theme was that of crossing the wilderness. Left behind seventeen months ago, there is a large jar of empty branches still in our chapel at Lake Otis and Tudor, that was a visual symbol to of us of barrenness, new discovery, and life yet to come. Little did we know back then of what was ahead. We spoke of Wilderness as a place of stripping away what is non-essential. We spoke of a return to what is most basic and of a rediscovery of God's presence among us in a long journey. Wow! Prescient.

During the past seventeen months, we have grieved and lamented of all that has been lost: Loved ones, over 600,000 Americans, 360 Alaskans and our much beloved former rector Chuck Eddy among them. We have been on the longest fast from the physical Eucharist in our collective lives. How we have longed to physically embrace one another again during the passing of the peace. To sit in our pew and gaze out upon the mountains through the glass.

But we have also learned many lessons, and adapted to new ways of being the people of God together. Phone calls and texts have replaced pastoral conversations over coffee and donuts in Waldron Hall. Vestry leader Jess Sulley and her Children's Christian Formation Team brought us in-home Godly Play boxes and so many helped distribute Advent and Lenten gift bags of materials and prayers. The Bazaar team mastered Zoom, as did we all.

3

For decades, we have proclaimed that “the Church is not the building, the People are the church,” but we lived into that reality in a way beyond our prior imaginings.

Through these many long months, you have been exceptionally patient, and kind, and understanding, and supportive. I and the staff and clergy and other leadership are eternally grateful You have been, truly, a class act. Although these past two years have been the hardest time to be in ministry in my more than twenty-five years of ordained leadership, I have never been more grateful and proud of the people of St. Mary’s. You have endured much, and discovered much.

And now, over the next eight weeks, we will slowly, thoughtfully, carefully, and pastorally, return in large part to in-person worship on the hill at Lake Otis and Tudor, alternating at first, for a time, with outdoor services in our parking lot, and then slowly migrating indoors as the weather turns toward Fall.

Remember, we have among us those who, for medical reasons, cannot be vaccinated, are particularly medically vulnerable, or who, like children and some youth, are still waiting for vaccines to become available to them.

Each week, when we are scheduled to hold indoor services, we will be able to accommodate larger numbers of people, until we reach our capacity. We will use links in the newsletter to organize and manage attendance invitations. Because of the immense drain on time and resources that such services require, *just for right now*, we will continue simply to have *one* combined 10am service. All the while, we will continue to be simultaneously online as we have been.

We will have new and changing guidelines for masking and will continue to follow the best science and diocesan requirements for in-person worship. We will continue to include and embrace those of us located outside of Anchorage who have now become part of us over Zoom, and Twitch, and Facebook Live these last seventeen months. We will not cut off, abandon or leave you behind. Our best estimate is that, on any given Sunday, twenty percent of those in worship with us are not physically located in Anchorage that day. We see you, and you matter to us.

And we will make peace with the unmistakable reality that things *have* changed. And we *have* changed, and while there will be a “new normal” in time, things will never be completely the same as they once were, because *we* will never be the same as we once were.

In a sense, this has historically always been the case, but so much more so now.

Sometimes we value the church as the one thing in our changing world that does *not* change, our steady rock to which we cling and find comfort. That feeling is entirely understandable, but at the same time it is unrealistic and false. The reality and truth are that the church has always been in a state of constant change. Most of us would experience an 18th century church service as dreadful – the sermon alone often exceeded two hours in length... but the faith of those gathered, and the love and grace of God remains steadfast through the years.

This morning we have, by invitation, a small group of ten people here, in addition to our clergy and musicians. They are “guinea-pigs” of sorts, which is quite an unflattering term for me to use... as we continue to figure out acoustics and camera angles and sightlines in this brave new world of hybrid services – worshipping simultaneously online and in-person. We have installed a large screen up over the altar in a way that does not obscure the altar – and which retracts completely into the ceiling, hidden from view. We have eight pan and zoom cameras and a control booth in a closet that runs six laptops simultaneously, mixing everything from sound feeds to video,

For some, this is startling and distressing. But for most of us, we will also recognize that it is all in the service of *being* the church, the people of God gathered.

It’s not unlike the Ark of the Covenant itself, strange as that might sound at first. We recognize God’s presence among us, in part through the presence of one another. Even a screen can be a holy thing – a window into the image and likeness of God reflected through the faces lit up by electrons and flying through that good old “series of tubes”³, the internet. Perhaps this is as much a challenge to some of us as the day the first guitar was brought into worship at St Mary’s so many years ago. Who here remembers how startled some felt when the voice of the celebrant in the then “new” sanctuary was amplified by the sound system for that first time, back in 1993? And, *help us Lord*, we were asked to sit in chairs, not wooden pews and worship with a “new” prayerbook.

But we will survive, and we will all adapt, and by the Mercy and Grace of God, we will flourish and be filled with Joy in due season. As the Bible says in the entirely different context of Isaiah 41:10:

*Fear not, for I am with you;
Be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you,
Yes, I will help you,
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.*

In invite you to pay closer attention than ever to the church e-newsletter as we roll out changes in how we gather. It comes to you in your e-mail in-box every Thursday afternoon. You can sign up for it, if you don’t already do so, at the bottom of our webpage at GodsView.org.

May the Grace and Peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, for God is amongst us, always and forever, amen.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Series_of_tubes

Scripture Readings for This Sunday

The Collect

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

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.

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Psalm 24

1 The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, *
the world and all who dwell therein.

2 For it is he who founded it upon the seas *
and made it firm upon the rivers of the deep.

3 "Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? " *
and who can stand in his holy place?"

4 "Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, *
who have not pledged themselves to falsehood,
nor sworn by what is a fraud.

5 They shall receive a blessing from the Lord *
and a just reward from the God of their salvation."

6 Such is the generation of those who seek him, *
of those who seek your face, O God of Jacob.

7 Lift up your heads, O gates;
lift them high, O everlasting doors; *
and the King of glory shall come in.

8 "Who is this King of glory?" *
"The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle."

9 Lift up your heads, O gates;
lift them high, O everlasting doors; *
and the King of glory shall come in.

10 "Who is he, this King of glory?" *
"The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory."

The Epistle

Ephesians 1:3-14

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

The Gospel

Mark 6:14-29

King Herod heard of Jesus and his disciples, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.