

Grace Episcopal Church, Galena IL

July 15, 2012

"With All Their Might"

Sermon by Rev. Gloria Hopewell, D.Min.

Text—2 Samuel 6: 1-5; 12b-19

A poem by Wilbur Rees:

I would like to buy three dollars worth of God, please.

Not enough to explode my soul and disturb my sleep.

Not enough to take control of my life.

I want just enough to equal a cup of warm milk.

Just enough to ease some of the pain from my guilt.

I would like to buy three dollars worth of God, please.

I would like to find a love that is pocket-sized.

I don't want enough of God to make me love a black man or pick beets with a
migrant.

Not enough to change my heart.

I can only stand just enough to take to church when I have time.

Just enough to equal a snooze in the sunshine.

I want ecstasy, not transformation.

I want the warmth of the womb, but not a new birth.

I would like to purchase a pound of the eternal in a paper sack.

If it doesn't work, I would like to get my money back.

I would like to buy three dollars worth of God, please.

I would like to hide some for a rainy day.

Not enough for people to see a change in me.

Not enough to impose any responsibility.

Just enough to make folks think I am ok.

Could I just get three dollars worth of God, please?

Three dollars worth of God. Not much of an investment, is it? This doesn't seem to describe the King David we just heard about in our reading from the Hebrew Scriptures, no matter what currency was used in his time. King David and his people, dancing

“with all of their might,” in a joyous procession into Jerusalem. Bringing the Ark of the Covenant to its new resting place. Giving all that they had—body and soul—in their singing, their instruments, and their dancing.

Any of you who have followed the Indiana Jones movies know that the Ark of the Covenant was not a boat—not Noah’s ark. This was a special container, dating back to the time of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land. It was built to God’s exacting specifications, to hold the stone tablets--the Ten Commandments--given to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

It was made of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. Over-laid with pure gold, inside and out. A ring of gold was put on each of its four feet so that poles of gold–covered acacia wood could be inserted to carry the ark.

On top were two hammered gold cherubim facing each another with wings spread overshadowing the mercy seat between them. It was at the mercy seat that God spoke with Moses to deliver all commands for the Israelites.

The Ark of the Covenant rested within the inner court of a huge tent, the “tent of meeting” when the Israelites were at rest. When they moved on, it was carried to the next place. When they finally reached the Promised Land after forty years of the wilderness, the Ark proceeded them across the Jordan River and into Canaan.

In the Promised Land, the Ark alternated between two holy sites. When tribes went into battle, the Ark would lead the troops who believed that it would bring victory and blessings. At one point, it was stolen by the Philistines. But rather than blessings, they had an outbreak of the plague, lost the battle, and had an economic disaster, so they sent the Ark back on an oxcart. It was neglected for about twenty years, until David decided to bring it to Jerusalem and establish Jerusalem as the holy city. Later, it was moved to the 1st Temple built by David’s son Solomon. Then, in the 6th century, BCE, the Babylonians demolished and desecrated the Temple, and the Ark was either destroyed or lost—never to be found—even by the likes of Indiana Jones.

This sacred object had an enormous importance in the religious life of Israel. It was not just that it contained the Law given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. It also signified the very presence of God and the source of blessing. And it marked a shift from tribal life to a kingdom, a shift from God in the world to God in the Temple—a central, single place for sacrifice.

The entrance of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem had many layers of symbolic meaning. It was liturgical —clearly a religious event, as David served God. But it was also political—signifying David’s authority in a powerful fashion.

David, we remember, the youngest son of Benjamin, a mere shepherd boy, was anointed as a teen. He was described as the beloved of God, and in spite of his human flaws and some very large mistakes, he did serve God with faithfulness and great passion. His reign as king brought the uniting of Israel and Judah into one nation.

It is hard for us, perhaps, to relate to this Ark. We don’t have anything that corresponds to it. Nor do we have a king considered to be divinely chosen. We have no Jerusalem, no place that is holier than any other. Oh, we have our sacred symbols—our Bible, cross, altar, and baptismal font, but we’re clear that God is not contained in these things. We are just as likely to say that we see God in nature and in the faces and acts of one another.

Ah, but we do have our sacraments. Our means of grace where we encounter the presence of God through Christ. Do we approach the table with the joy and awe of David?

This past week, I have been teaching worship and sacraments at the United Methodist seminary in Evanston. The program is for what the Methodists call “local pastors” — those who serve small rural congregations that cannot afford seminary educated or ordained clergy. I was struck by the descriptions of one man’s congregations (he serves three in the upper peninsula of Michigan). I was saddened, too, because it struck a chord with some of my own experiences. He told of how the people approached communion—not joyously but with solemn faces. And just once a month—more often would be too repetitive, they say. And before my student arrived, it felt like it was just tacked on at the end of the service, rushed through so people could be out in one hour.

I recalled a recent survey of mainline churches that showed that many—perhaps even most—people come to church for many reasons—for community and belonging. For support in tough times. But not necessarily with joy and tragically, NOT expecting to encounter God in worship.

MAYBE that’s not quite right. MAYBE we come expecting to encounter God—but only \$3 worth of God. Not enough to demand anything of us, not enough to “explode our souls, disturb our sleep, or change our hearts” as the poet told us. Not enough to be changed as David, and indeed the prophets and all who have answered God’s call, have been changed.

Well, Grace Church knows how to do a parade! Maybe we didn't have 30,000 faithful warriors. Maybe we didn't have a king leading us through town. But we danced! Does that joy translate into our worship?

I've been with you for 3 months as of this week. And so far, I believe that it does. I believe that we celebrate whether it be in worship, on a float in a parade, or in our parish events. Here we are, today, worshiping outdoors. Not in our beautiful church. In fact, maybe this is more like what David had—a tent of meeting. At the end of the celebration, David gave each person a gift of bread and meat and wine. We look forward to the tables—the Eucharist and then the brunch. We will be well fed.

So, how about it? Shall we encounter God with joy and celebration? Will you seek more than \$3 worth? Will you dance with me, "with all of our might?"

Amen and amen.