

God in a Box

2 Samuel 6 / Hebrews 9:1-10

8&10am church St Stephens, Belrose
15 October 2017

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A couple wks ago Leisa & I went camping in central Aust - To see Uluru, Kata Tjuta, Kings Canyon, Ormiston Gorge, swimming in chilly waterholes, (3 Photo slides) at night sleeping in a swag where I gazed at the night sky, recalling the names of stars & constellations - The Pleides, Orion, Taurus, Scorpio ... waking in the early hrs & noticing which stars had set in the west & risen in the eastern sky, Mars & Venus bright in the East. Thru the day & night in the outback I was reminded of God's creativity & the vastness of creation.

1) Background - Israel & the ark

I was reminded of the nation of Israel who, having been rescued out of Egypt, under Moses' leadership, spent 40 years wandering in the desert, how God protected them, fed them manna bread, gave them instructions for life and worship God promised to be with them and he gave them a sign of his presence

- they were to build a chest from acacia wood (Ark slide)
- inside to place the stone tablets of the 10 commandments, Aaron's staff that had budded(Num17), a bowl of manna bread - to remind them of the exodus, of God's law, provision & rule.
- The chest was overlaid with gold, 2 angelic figures on the lid between which God's presence would manifest not all of the vastness of God - you cant put God in a box - but his presence nonetheless. There were strict rules given by God(Num 4): **Don't look, Don't touch, carrying a certain way** - God is not to be trifled with, mess with God at your own peril ... as such the ark fascinates Hollywood - See Indiana Jones video clip
- The movie is a classic but as Hollywood does, it doesn't understand the significance of the ark or the God behind it.
- This ark not only was the place where God's presence was manifest, it was on the lid the blood of a bull was sprinkled each year as a symbol of God's forgiveness of sin.... **the ark had its place in the Tabernacle, the mobile temple - God's presence with his people.**

- God's presence was a very tangible thing - for the 40yrs in the desert they had been led out each day by a cloud & at night by a fiery column.
- Once in the land here were times when the Israelites did things God's way they experienced God's blessing other times when they tried to use the ark as a lucky charm God didn't cooperate. One time the ark was captured by the Philistines & God wreaked so much damage that they sent the Ark back, when it was back in Israel some people decided to look inside and they died(1Sam4)
Indiana Jones & the Raiders of the Lost Ark made some mileage of that.... but with Nazis! :)

2) Casual folly (vv1-8)

This morning we read from 2 Sam 6 where King David wants to bring the ark of God's presence to his new capital — no doubt there was some political expediency here as well as good motive to establish his kingdom with God prominently centre stage. But from king, down to the family charged with transporting this chest, there was complacency - they ignored the rules!%\$@! - This casual folly is seen in vv1-8

- for a start, **you don't** put this piece of furniture(box), this golden symbol of God's presence, representing his law, his mercy & power ... on a cart drawn by oxen!!..... **you have the designated priestly tribe(Levites) carry the ark as the law required, you use the special poles thru the rings in the side of the chest - & you honour God thru this process.**
- as it happens the oxen, as they pull the cart with the ark, they stumble and one of the men, Uzzah, reach out to steady the ark and he is struck down dead!!! **I always felt sorry for this guy because his was a natural reaction when something looks like falling but you wouldn't do that if the object was white hot, or radioactive, or that you knew not to touch it on pain of death!!** - reflex or not it was a stupid thing to do.
- v7 Uzzah's action was described as irreverent, & God's anger burned against him
- **take away message - "Be casual with God at your own peril".**

- That's not to say Uzzah was the only one who treated God too casually - I mean the others involved with the transporting, incl David, didn't do things God's way ... **maybe Uzzah, would say from heaven "Guys, don't mess with God, his rules have good reasons. Be thankful everyone didn't get struck down".**
- And the king, David, stepped back from his own political ambitions & licked his wounds.
- **We can be going thru the motions & never really grasp that the life of faith is a relationship with God ... we might 'stuff-up' sometimes but obedience comes from relationship, lets 'lean into God' & grow our relationship with him - we try to do that as a church community.**
- **A healthy relationship with God produces joyful service** (we see this in vv9-19)

3) Joyful service (vv9-19)

The next few vv. are interesting - David is pretty shaken - he's angry with God & afraid to go further. He leaves the ark at the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite - Obed-Edom was a Philistine but a godly man & for the 3 mths the ark is there his whole household is blessed - **God's severity is circumstantial, he is so ready to bless**

So David, humbled by God, has another go - & **he does it all right** - the right people(Levites), the right way(carried on poles) & right attitude - it's not about David, it is about giving glory to God.

Prominent in these vv is David dancing in front of the ark - he is so pleased to be ushering the ark into the city, so relieved that it is happening.

- Here is David, the king, dancing in his loin cloth - equivalent to ancient underpants!! He doesn't care how silly it appears, that everyone is seeing him like this - This is David who slew Goliath because Goliath spoke scornfully against God, the king who has triumphed in fierce battles, David the musician & poet - Here he is **'dancing before the Lord with all his might'**
- This guy knows God, loves God, his decorum goes out the window as he celebrates before God. **(I'm not much of a dancer so I would do something different!)**

- **No 'God in a box' for David**, this relationship has fearful respect & unbridled joy held together - respect for God means he honours God & his ark, but he rejoices before God as his creator, Lord, friend.
- We all have times when our relationship with God is a bit dry, when we go thru the motions, don't read the Bible, don't pray, live as if God wasn't there.
- Maybe you have never been convinced about Jesus or had an experience of God.
- **Either way**, the invitation of God is: "Come & see", "Ask, seek & you will find". - maybe its time to disregard what others may think, put aside our reservations, set aside the distractions & 'just do it', don't hold back, respond to God with gusto.
- What gets you enthused? Your passion lifted? Blaikie: "There are doubtless times to be calm & times to be enthusiastic but there is something wrong if we end up giving all our coldness to Christ and all our enthusiasm to the world" - **there is much joy to be had in following Jesus.**

There is one more observation I wanted to make from these verses.

4) Bitter fruit (vv20-23)

There is Michal, David's wife, daughter of king Saul.

- There are a few sad reflections that could be made of David & Michal's relationship - it is clear that she had once loved David but it seems that she loved the prestige of royalty more.
- Michal doesn't share David's faith in God. As he dances before the Lord she despises him, she shares no joy in this glorious occasion but rebukes him for his joy.
- Whether as a result of them never sleeping together again, or God rendering her infertile, her haughty manner brings a bitter fruit.

The ark remained in Jerusalem, it was central to the Temple that Solomon, David's son built. Centuries after the ark arrived in Jerusalem God's presence departed the Temple due to the folly of the people's disregard for God. The ark remained - **just a golden box** - which was likely captured by the Babylonians in ~597BC ... hasn't been seen since! Hence the legends.

Before we finish lets see dip into the New Testament - the Jesus bit.

Because the ark points to Jesus.

5) Jesus - God in the flesh (Heb 9:1-10)

But God's plan didn't finish with the ark - this ark & the regulations of the Jewish Law pointed to the time when, in the fullness of time, God would give flesh to these symbols - God in human flesh.

In the opening verses of John's Gospel he writes of Jesus:

"In the beginning was the Word & the Word was God. Through him all things were made"

14 The Word became flesh & made his dwelling among us (he *tabernacled among us*). Jesus was with them like the mobile temple, John describes being with Jesus: "**We have seen his glory, the glory of the one & only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace & truth.**"

In our NT reading Heb 9:9 the offerings in the OT as described as not being able to clear the conscience of the worshipper, v10 describes the ark and the Law as: '**external regulations applying until the time of the new order**'

...it all hinged on Jesus - with Jesus the new order has come

- Jesus was God's presence among his people & he has given the Spirit to every believer ... a glimpse of his presence with us until the end of the age.
- No more blood sacrifices for sin because on the cross Jesus has satisfied the justice of God against human sin. We are freely forgiven as we trust in Jesus & we learn a new way of living
- Even the Promised Land a signpost for something better - a restored creation in the fullness of time:
 - I have been a Christian for 38 years & I am still learning.
 - Its easy to be casual about God, complacent - but as with any relationship time & effort are required to grow.
 - There's no relationship I want to grow in more than with my creator to know more the joy, the beauty, the freedom that Jesus brings.
 - To find life rich & meaningful now & a glorious future before me, rightly holding the tension between a fearful respect of God & unbridled confident joy in knowing his love.

How about you? Are you drifting along or is Jesus leading you? We'd love to help you, that's what we believe church is about.