

Call to Worship (based on Psalm 85: 1-2, 8-13)

Peace-loving and peace-giving God, you bless us with your unfailing and unconditional love:

We come to worship and praise our loving God, and rejoice in God's tender mercy towards us.

Generous God, in you and through you
Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other

We come to worship and honour our merciful God, and rejoice in the wonder of peace and unity

Holy God, in the beauty of your shalom, and in the steadfast love of your presence,
your glory dwells in our hearts

We come to worship and revere our glorious God, who enriches the lives of God's own people and speaks peace into our hearts. Amen.

Hymn: 153 Great is thy faithfulness

<https://youtu.be/dTKlqmdfHSk>

Prayer of Approach and Confession and the Lord's Prayer

Almighty and Eternal God

We come before your presence singing and rejoicing
From all that we are - for all that you are –
we offer our love to you.

O God breath of our souls,

you are the heartbeat of our delight and longing. We give you thanks for all the moments of our lives that are filled with the joy of being your creatures on this amazing planet.

Thank you for the languages of music and rhythm that cross all boundaries. Thank you for the signs and symbols of your presence with us.

Help us to be the song you sing and the movement you dance so that with your people throughout the whole earth, we might enjoy the glorious life that you lavish upon your beautiful world.

God of the universe

We confess that we often turn away from the new life you give. Forgive us when we allow our hurts and wounds to dampen the joy we might express and the hope by which we might live. Loosen the fear that binds our hearts so that we might welcome your glorious presence into every aspect of our lives.

In the silence, we bring before you all those things, which we regret, the things that lie heavy on our hearts and for which we would ask for your forgiveness.

SILENCE

Beloved friends, God's love is lavish.

God's forgiveness is unending.

Receive God's love;

Receive God's forgiveness

Know God's love and peace

and celebrate with joy, and song

and let's join together now in saying the prayer that Jesus taught us: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory for ever Amen.

Bible Readings: 2 Samuel 6:1-5 Ephesians 1:3-14 (NRSVA)

Hymn: 189 be still for the presence of the Lord

<https://youtu.be/AKfyudrhGK4>

Reflection

Last week we were thinking about authority and power as we heard the stories of David being anointed as King over the whole of Israel and of Jesus preaching in his hometown.

Our reading from 2nd Samuel tells us some of what happened next in David's story...

Between the conquest of Canaan under Joshua - and Samuel's anointing of David as king - Israel existed as a tribal confederation. Through all those years, the Ark of the Covenant served as the main symbol of God's presence with the tribes of Israel. It also acted as a symbol of their unity.

Now that David has established his new political capital for Israel at Jerusalem, he sets out to bring back the Ark of the Covenant, this is a significant step and will cement the union of all the tribes under his rule.

Of course, as you know, the Ark is a symbol of tremendous power. Even today it features in many fictional stories and films you'll all remember 'Raiders of the Lost Ark', for instance. Even in this account given to us in the Bible you may read on to learn of strange events that happened.

We know a little about the Ark - it was a rectangular box about 4 foot long by two and a half foot wide and two and a half foot high, it was covered with gold and carried on poles inserted into rings at the four lower corners. The lid or mercy seat was a gold plate surrounded by two cherubs with outspread wings. Moses tablets of stone were stored in the ark along with a pot of manna and Aaron's rod.

The Ark as I said was a powerful symbol it played a significant part in the crossing of the Jordan, the fall of Jericho, and the ceremony of 'Remembering the covenant at Mount Ebal', it had been captured by the Philistines on the battlefield at Ebenezer after which, the Philistines suffered seven months of plagues. They blamed the presence of the Ark for this and so returned it to Kiriath-Jearim where it had remained for 20 years.

Bringing this symbol of God's presence and Israel's unity will consolidate the new realm and bring all the tribes together. So David goes to Kiriath Jearim, to the house of Abinadab on the hill and he starts out to bring the Ark to Jerusalem.

If there is one thing that stands out in this text it is the expression of joy as the procession accompanies the Ark on its journey to Jerusalem. The Hebrew word used is sahaq this word can mean to sport, to jest, to laugh, to sing, to dance, and to play - like English it has the sense to play as children do and also to play a musical instrument.

Music, song, dance this is truly a joyous occasion. There is a spontaneity and lightness spilling through this text. Both ruler and warriors play in celebration of God's presence and they are celebrating or perhaps playing and laughing with all their might. AND remember here that David took 30,000 men and all were dancing and playing and laughing. It would have been quite a sight.

If we read on though, we find that instead of respectfully carrying the Ark its put on a cart and one of the priests Uzzah reaches out to steady the Ark when it sin danger of falling off and he dies. This makes David think again about bringing the Ark to Jerusalem and instead he leaves it at the house of Obed Edom for three months. The house of Obed Edom had great fortune and was blessed during this time so David saw this as auspicious and finally brought the Ark, and that great power of God, to Jerusalem with great celebrations once again.

The story ends on a note of blessing and homecoming. David celebrates the Ark's arrival in Jerusalem with the blessing of offerings. The people of Israel who gather to celebrate also receive a blessing in the name of the Lord Almighty from David; and they also receive food.

The one called to be their king and shepherd (the root word in Hebrew means 'to feed') blesses them and gives them food

- as the Ark symbolises God's presence in Israel, so David portrays that presence with actions previously undertaken by God himself .

The bringing of the Ark to Jerusalem marks the beginning of the linking together of two ancient symbols the Ark and the Temple, with the city of Jerusalem, the city of David, the city of God.

There is such a massive contrast with this story from 2nd Samuel and our reading from Ephesians today. From locating the power and presence of God in a manmade ark, in a temple, in a city –

the reading from Ephesians is dizzying in the scope of God's power and presence – it mentions things on heaven and on earth – in temporal terms it stretches from before the foundation of the world, through to a plan for the fullness of time. This sweep of time and space, outlining God's purposes in Christ, is part of the universality of the letter. This passage lays the foundation for the revelation of a universal and cosmic picture of the Christian faith that, while it does not disown Jewish tradition, gives an equal place to Gentiles within God's plan –because they too were chosen to be part of 'one new humanity' (2.15). The energy and direction of God's plan is revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the promise 'to gather up all things in him'.

Christ's coming teaches us that God's presence is not limited to a certain people - we are now all his adopted children - nor is it limited to a certain time or place; we can worship God and feel his presence anywhere.

Yet if this pandemic has shown us one thing it is that our churches – our places of worship are important to us. They are the places where we celebrate. They are the places where we go to look for God's presence and where we can sometimes feel a greater sense of God's presence. They are the places where we celebrate the great events of life – birth – baptism – marriage and death. They are the places where we share our fellowship, our care and our support. They are the places we join together to

celebrate Holy Communion and share meals and music and singing.

These are all things we have greatly missed in these long months of pandemic. It is a great joy to look forwards to a time coming soon when we can worship and celebrate, when we can freely sing and share communion and eat together and hug one another...and most importantly to laugh together once again. We look forward in joy yet we also need to be aware that everybody needs to take his or her own time to feel comfortable in coming back to church once again. But, soon and very soon...we will be able to celebrate and sing out once again. Thanks be to God Amen.

Hymn: 804 You shall go out with joy

<https://youtu.be/cjL27TISwYU>

