

The Ark on the Move (1 Samuel 4:1-7:1)

This is an interesting chapter in Israel's history. The events in this section of 1 Samuel largely surround encounters with the Ark of the Covenant which represents the Presence of God.

Have you noticed that the presence of certain people in your life brings either energy and comfort or anxiety and pessimism?

(The story of _____)

The Ark of the Covenant symbolized the very presence of God with Israel in 2 ways:

1. His presence rested between the cherubim and made his presence known to the High Priest at key moments for the benefit of Israel.
2. It was sometimes called the Ark of the testament because it contained the 10 commandments, a jar of Manna, and Aaron's rod the budding—all testaments to the kind of relationship God had established with this nation of former slaves by his presence

TS- But like people in our lives, the presence of God can evoke different responses from us as people. It certainly did in 1 Samuel chapters 4 through 6.

We saw people respond to the Ark with...

- Shouts of victory and cheering (Israelites b4 battle)
- Fear and foreboding (Ashdod and Ekron)
- Religious appeasement (Philistine priest and Diviners)
- Morbid curiosity and death (the people of Beth Shemesh)
- A desire to get it as far away from them as possible (It gave them hemorrhoids! Transport it with cows on a cart)

- A dread that it would be taken and moved far away (death of Eli at the news)

Like encountering the Ark of the Covenant, when we encounter God's presence in our lives, it can produce a number of reactions:

1. It can enlighten you or it can frighten you

Who did it enlighten in today's passage?

Who did it frighten?

If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, then the Philistines ironically were the "enlightened ones". They were both enlightened and frightened by the Ark. They tested it to see if it was God or coincidence that brought the hardships to them and sought to deal with the guilt issue through sacrifice.

Israel showed the axiom to be true: "familiarity brings contempt".

- Last week's passage told us Eli's sons did crooked things to their own advantage like Aaron's sons had in the past in the presence of the Ark.
- They took it out of the tabernacle and brought it into camp (they always covered it when traveling before)
- They never even asked God why they were defeated and if they should fight again.
- They used it as a good luck charm.
- They even took the lid off to see what was inside and met their deaths.

Eli-was one of the few who was so frightened that the Ark (presence of God) had left their nation that he fell and broke

his neck when he heard the news of the Ark capture (over even hearing the news of the death of his sons!).

Do we think of God's presence in our lives like a good luck charm? An exemption from the suffering in this world?

Do we take for granted his presence by refraining from prayer, living by our own wisdom, and failing to surrender what we are trying to control in our lives but cannot?

When I find myself in routines that negate a heartfelt engagement with God about what each day holds in my life, I find myself taking him for granted and sliding into the error of Israel.

- I'm a Christian so I'm forgiven. I don't need to talk about my issues to him. He knows.
- I don't want to ask him for something that big. If he says no, I will be too disappointed.
- Prayerless self-dependence when serving. (Gene & LaHabra: "the horse is made ready for battle but the victory rest with the Lord"- Prov 21:31).

2. It can engage you or enrage you

Do you remember when Jesus was challenged by the Jewish leaders to silence those celebrating his entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? He said that if they stopped shouting that the rocks would cry out.

It should surprise us that the most powerful reaction to the presence of God in today's passage came from an inanimate object. That's right. The most appropriate and authentic response came from a rock-or something made from a rock...Dagon. Note his reaction: defeat (head and hands cut off), and worship (bowing down). God has to defeat us

sometimes to get us to surrender. Once we are defeated we can be angry (I've been there) or surrender and bow down to see what he can do not that we are done.

This process can either engage or enrage you. Hemorrhoids& Rats- how personal and public is that! They were engaged though.

Why is this kind of engagement so difficult for us? For some people, when they are exposed in any way that may require admission of fault, responsibility, a need, vulnerability or omission, they are angered, become self protective, or defensive....even offensive. Why? Because in their experience, what follows genuine vulnerability and admission is abuse, ridicule, loss, criticism or distancing.

People of the Word/Christ Followers here at Eastside: When was the last time you were engaged or enraged?

For me...

3. It can save you or enslave you

Someone from the next generation, though imperfectly, would get this "reaction to the presence of God thing" right. David would have they Ark transported to Mount Zion where he lived and the Temple would be built someday. He did that so he could worship there. In Psalm 27:4 he wrote:

**One thing I ask from the LORD,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.**

Tim Keller and the Prodigal God: The two sons.-both using the Father to get what they want. One uses religion the other rebellion. The 2 sons are kind of like Israel and the Philistines (Jew and Gentile if you will). Both are lost: Israel in religion and the Philistines in rebellion. Both are slaves: One to his own sin, the other to his own performance. (The older brother-Out on the porch, refusing to go into the party....)

Henri Nouwen points out by studying the story and **meditating on this painting by Rembrandt** that the goal of our reaction to God's presence in our lives is not ultimately to be the prodigal son or the older brother. It's to be the Father.

That means our spiritual journeys really look like this:

- a. We start like the Prodigal
- b. We become the older brother
- c. If we are willing, we become like the Father (saved, not enslaved)

What is the Father like? The Ark shows us:

The Cherubim: the cherubs guarded the way back to the Tree of Life in Gen 3.

The Covenant- table of contents: testaments to a covenant not a contract.

Illus: sales for my dad's company (Parties, Terms and Promises).

The Ark shows us a God that not only wants us to come home to the Father (Cheribum), but will help us fulfill

what's necessary to be with God (Covenant-10
commandments, Aaron's Rod, Manna)

That's what it means to enjoy the presence of God. That's what
we can learn from this week's stories.

According to the last verse in today's passage, for twenty years the
presence of God would remain somewhere in waiting. They didn't
know what to do with him.

Do we today?

Where is he present now in your life? Who in today's story are you
reacting like in light of his presence? Get out of the pig pen, or get
off the front porch and join the Party.

Pray