

“Faith into Action”

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2 Samuel 6:1-5; 12b-19 & Ephesians 1:3-14

Wall Street United & St. John's United combined Virtual Church (wk 69)

Last Sunday we shared a message from the Psalms, Psalm 148 to be exact. This is a Psalm that was written by King David. David had an extremely active and personal relationship with his God and wanted all his people to recognize what God had done for them and to realize that God was worthy of all the praise that the people, all living things on earth, and indeed, the earth itself could offer to God. David did not have the slightest hesitation to put his faith into words.

This morning we see yet another aspect of David. Words alone were not enough! He put his faith into action!

To understand this we have to look back. When God gave Moses the instructions on how to build an ark, not only the instructions on building, but the handling of the ark were very specific. When the Israelite people finally entered the Promised Land after 40 years in the wilderness the ark was carried by the priests across the Jordan River and taken to the city of Shiloh. This city became the main center of worship for the Israelite people. The ark stayed here for over 400 years until the Philistines conquered Israel and took the ark.

Big mistake! God caused all kinds of disasters to fall on the Philistines. They recognized that the God of the Israelites was causing all this trouble. So, after having the ark in their possession for seven months they returned it to Israel. Several communities were not comfortable with having the ark in their possession and it was eventually taken to the home of Abinadab where it remained for some years.

King Saul was not interested in the ark but King David certainly was. He sent men to the home of Abinadab to bring the ark to Jerusalem where David planned to restore the Temple. In the first part of our reading from 2nd Samuel we learn that he rather messed up on this first attempt.

David had the sons of Abinadab escort the ark on a new cart pulled by oxen. This was contrary to God's instructions for moving the ark. The result was a disaster. The cart started to tip over and one of the sons touched the ark. He died instantly.

The ark was left at Obed-edom until a second attempt could be made to convey it to Jerusalem. This time it was done correctly, carried with poles on the shoulders of priests. And this time it was done with a major celebration.

Now, there is an idea. Celebrating God with songs, with dance, with musical instruments. These people were excited, very excited, about their faith. David was at the center of it all, dancing with all his might. He had put aside the

robes which he wore as a King and wore a simple robe with an ephod, which is a type of apron. These were the garments of a simple priest.

So, have you heard or seen people singing and dancing in the streets lately? Wednesday, when the Tampa Bay Lightning won the Stanley Cup they were certainly out in the streets celebrating. There was cheering in London, England when England defeated Denmark in a semi-final for the European section of the world cup. Other cities were also cheering victories by their teams, including Italy who defeated Spain.

Over the next few weeks athletes and coaches from all over the world will gather in Japan for the Olympic Games. The Olympic torch which started its trek in Greece will arrive in Japan and be escorted into the stadium to light the torch there. There will be a parade of athletes from many countries, each country led by an athlete proudly carrying the flag of their country. Normally, the stadium would be filled with cheering crowds. Music will be played and dancing and entertainment will be conducted. Unfortunately, this year, the fans will not be present due to Covid-19. But, millions of people will be watching on TVs or computers as the event is aired around the world.

So, people today can get excited. They can gather in crowds, as much as possible and sometimes exceeding the allowable limit, to cheer for teams in a number of sports. Last Sunday, there were major celebrations in the United States for their Independence Day. Concerts, fireworks and parades were part of this event. So, what has happened to celebrating our faith?

In our second reading this morning from the book of Ephesians, Paul is likely writing a general letter to a number of churches. He is the bearer of wonderful news, a reminder actually, of what believing in Jesus Christ means to them. It is different from our first reading in it concentrates on "Christ". The phrases "in Christ", "through Christ" and "on Christ" are used repeatedly. The news it brings is absolutely amazing. Yet, it does not convey the same sense of joy that David expressed over the return of the Ark of the Covenant.

Paul is talking about something more personal and more important. It applies to each person hearing the news and it includes each of us. It is not restricted to any one person or any one group. Whereas many religious mystical traditions require complete isolation, practicing transcendence in hermit-like seclusion, Paul believed that a mystical relationship with Christ was best experienced with fellow Christians, in a mutually caring, refining and serving community.

Paul used a wonderful expression in this reading. He tells us that "God has destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ." Not only are we to be adopted as God's children but we will receive an inheritance – an inheritance of eternal life.

Now usually when we talk about an inheritance we are discussing the beneficiaries of a will. A will is only opened and the inheritance distributed according to the terms of the will after the testator (the person making the will)

has died. So, if Paul is telling the early Christians that they will be getting an inheritance, does that mean that the testator, (in this case Jesus) had to die? The answer is unequivocally “Yes”!

Jesus did indeed die for us. Without his death, the penalty for our sins would not have been paid. We would have been separated from God. The glory of this inheritance is that Jesus rose from the dead!!

Do we really recognize the magnitude of this gift? Is this not something that we should be celebrating with words and music? Should we not be shouting our praises to God and not only on Sunday mornings?

We do hold a parade in Brockville although it was cancelled for the past two years. But it is held on Good Friday. It is a solemn event marking a tremendous sacrifice. It is a good thing to do, to get out on the streets, stopping at a number of locations where passages from the Bible are read out. Then the cross which is assembled in stages is carried on to the next location. At the end of the march a service is held at the final church visited.

But should we get outside our churches for a joyful parade with music, dancing and shouting the glad new “JESUS IS RISEN?” If we share the news about the crucifixion with our community perhaps we should also share the Easter celebration. And I am not talking about Easter eggs or chocolate bunnies. People are more involved with secular festivities than the most important ones – our Faith.

I am a Christian. Jesus Christ is my Saviour and I know that I will inherit the promise of eternal life when my life on earth is over. I suspect that most, if not all of you can make that same claim to the most important inheritance anyone could possibly receive.

But do we proclaim this message as much as we should? Do we even discuss our faith with our own family members? Do our offspring and other members of our family see and hear our faith lived out?

In the past few weeks, the Christian churches have come under fire, in some cases literally, because of the tragedy of the unmarked graves associated with the residential schools. The United Church apologized to the Indigenous Peoples in 1986 and received a response acknowledging the apology from the indigenous church at the 32nd General Council in 1988. In 1998, our Moderator, The Right Rev. Bill Phipps, addressed the former students of the United Church Indian Residential Schools and their families and communities.

Our new crest includes the four colours of the indigenous medicine wheel and the phrase “All my relations” translated in the Mohawk language is included on the border. How many of us, members of the church, are really familiar with these events?

It is time, I believe, to stand up for our faith, for our churches and for our Lord and Saviour. May we ask for the strength today and in the days to come to sing, to dance, to praise our God, to let all we meet know about the inheritance which they may claim through the blood of Jesus Christ. Amen