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The Stories We Don't Tell

2 Samuel 6: 1-5, 12b-19

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.

They brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the Lord. When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts, and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

For the briefest of times, when DVDs were king, one particularly neat feature were the cuts where the director, producers, and stars would talk over the movie about what happened in the making of it, and what might have hit the cutting room floor. I didn't generally have the attention span to watch - but not really watch - an entire movie in this way, but it does reflect our general fascination about why something didn't work within the story of the movie. It is an opportunity to think about the stories we don't tell. The stories we don't tell. That is a long list. A week or so ago, I caught up with one of my cousins - we're the same age, and childhood friends. I'm not good at small talk - like at all - so the conversation got deep fast. (Shrug) Occupational hazard, I suppose. So she

commented about a particular characteristic of many people in our family, and I made an off-hand comment, something like, "Well you know why THAT is." But, I discovered, she didn't know why that was, because THAT was a story we don't tell in our family. These are often the stories we dance around, but never really say: the conflict, the embarrassment, the abuse, the crime. And if we do tell these stories, we tell them at a whisper, we tell them in as few words as possible, because they're still the stories we'd rather not tell. The stories we're convinced provide no meaning to our life; the stories we're sure only rob us of life. These are stories that are unsolvable; that are unredeemable. But the truth is, these are still the stories that give meaning to our lives.

Today's reading from the Hebrew Scriptures is so beautiful on its face: David, now the uncontested King of Israel, the one who vanquished their foes and established Jerusalem as the capital of his kingdom, solidifies his reign by bringing the Ark, which represents God's presence on earth, into Jerusalem. Leading the Ark's procession, he sacrifices an insane and uncomfortable amount of animals, and - this is the beautiful part - he dances with all his might.

But when the wise Consultation on Common Texts - the group that created our three-year cycle of texts for worship - when they selected this text to be part of a summer series on David and his successors they took a huge chunk out of the middle of it. And this story within the story - this story we'd rather not tell - is about Uzzah - Uzzah who was given the honor of driving the cart that carried the Ark. But at a point in the journey, the way was not smooth, and the oxen shook the cart, and Uzzah, even though he was among the chosen men, was not consecrated. And Uzzah, untrained as a priest, did what priests trembled to do. Uzzah, with his heart in the right place, and knowing how even the most sacred of objects can fall to the ground and shatter into a million pieces, reached his unconsecrated hand up to steady the Ark, the throne of God on earth, and - according to this chunk not given to us today to read - God struck him dead then and there. And David - the once shepherd boy, the songwriter, the loyal soldier, the faithful conquerer, the man after God's own heart - his faith is shaken to its core. And he actually stops what he is doing for three months. This is a story we rarely tell. We rarely tell it because we, like David, end up shaken to the core. What does this faith mean? Are we, as the Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards once intoned, merely sinners in the hands of an angry God?

I thought about adding this omitted story this week, about reading it aloud in the place it shows up in our Bibles, but then I worried I'd have to make sense of it. That I'd have to find in this story of a wrathful God something that sets us free. (I really should have just chickened out and preached on the Ephesians texts; the gospel was certainly no help!) Yet, leaving it out seems to stand as the stark reminder of all the stories we don't tell - and they are many. Just as an example, in the 1960s and 70s when a group of Lutherans from several disparate groups got together to create a common worship source, a book that would become the stalwart green Lutheran Book of Worship and the blue Lutheran worship of Missouri Synod congregations, they only included the Psalms we'd use in worship; the Psalms that would come up in the three year lectionary cycle, which is

mostly only the happy Psalms. They left out - almost entirely - the imprecatory Psalms: the Psalms that call down God's wrath on enemies. After all, they were the stories we'd rather not tell. How do we make meaning out of our own victimhood? Where is our faith in that?

And then, of course, this week, the news was filled with the stories we'd rather not tell. Stories about our country's racist past, racist present, racist policies. Stories about how race is actually of our own making; and that racism is a system that oppresses us all. In preparation for our vacation trip to the Great Smoky Mountains, the Blue Ridge Mountains, and to the land there that belongs to the Cherokee Nation, and which included a brief but delightful and moving visit with Lisa Russell at our partner congregation, Living Waters Lutheran Church, we tried to teach our children about the Trail of Tears. And one of my big-hearted kids asked in all earnestness, "Does that mean our country is bad?" These are the stories we don't want to tell. These are the stories we don't want to tell, beloved, because, well, how will we ever find God in all this loss? But, beloved, that is precisely our call as the church. It is easy to see God in beautiful scenery, and gorgeous sunsets, in the generosity of strangers. It is easy to see God when you get a windfall of good luck. But the other times?

Luther once wrote, "A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is." We don't look at these stories of evil, of our worst choices as humanity, of unspeakable tragedy and pretend like they can be tied up with a neat bow. I do not know, really, what sense to make of God's actions against Uzzah. I do not know if I am right to pray for God's wrath on my enemies and what that says about my faith that is rooted so deeply in forgiveness. I do not know where God was when for centuries men and women and children were uprooted from their homes, shipped across the ocean, and enslaved for generations in this county. I cannot make sense of Manifest Destiny, of Jim Crow, of Redlining. I may not know where God is in all that, but I stake my faith on this single truth: *God is there.*

My theology professor, Dr. Monica Coleman, said every single class, "theology is what you think about when you think about God." And thus, we are all theologians. And about us Luther said, a person "deserves to be called a theologian...who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross." Translation? Everything we know about God points to the truth that if we want to look for God, we need look no further than the suffering of our neighbor. We need look no further than the stories we are too afraid to tell. We need look no further than the bottom of the rubble in Miami. We need look no further than the unrest in Haiti. We need look no further than the graves of 6 million and more dead by COVID. We need look no further than the disappointments and frustrations of trying to be a faithful people in contentious times, of trying to bring about God's kin-dom in a world hell-bent on its own destruction.

Where does this leave us, beloved? David finally picked up the Ark because, having seen God's wrath, what came next was God's blessing. He heard a rumor that the home where

he'd left the Ark was being blessed. And so David brought the Ark into Jerusalem and danced it in with all his might. And maybe that is what we are called to do, Beloved, to dance with all our might between the stories we cannot wait to tell and the stories at least part of us want to silence forever. To dance with all our might between sin and redemption, between evil and good, between death and life, and to trust that God is there in it all.

Amen.