



Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday
The Rev. C. Alfred Loua Sermon Transcript

“When We Falter: Lessons in Human Frailty”

In today’s sermon we encounter dramatic moments in the lives of several key biblical figures: from the death of Uzzah, steps from King David, after touching the Ark of the Covenant; to the beheading of John the Baptist, after which Herod “probably never slept well again.” Major life events “are the best occasions to learn who God is and who we are,” preaches Father Loua. Watch his sermon to hear him use these stories to underscore our values of stewardship, social justice, and integrity. The scriptures are 2 Samuel 6:1–5, 12b–19; Psalm 24; Ephesians 1:3–14 and Mark 6:14–29.

Sermon Transcript:

When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of Hosts and distributed food among 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. Amen. Please be seated.

Isn't it beautiful? A beautiful ending of a memorable joyful event of the transfer of the Ark of God from its resting place at Baal Judah to Jerusalem, the new capital, event led by the new King David, and all the house of Israel. All the best artists were there, musicians, including David himself, he was a great musician. But he is leading the dance at this time. All the best singers and dancers, they were there. Can you imagine the atmosphere? God moving from a resting place to another place they built for Him. Probably that is the joyful souvenir that the church wants us to keep from this story, as the verses 6-12A were intentionally left out. The readings that the church offers for our reflection and meditation always aim to continue to help us grow in our knowledge of God and ourselves and cultivate our closeness to God until we are before His throne, adoring Him face to face. During this transition of the Ark of God, King David is overexcited. He is dancing, and he had never danced that way and he will never dance again that way. But what is this Ark of God?

Who is David himself leading this extraordinary and unique event? This Ark is the one that God himself ordered Moses during the Exodus to find someone to craft it. It contained the tablet of the first 10 commandments that Moses received on Mount Sinai. It is a symbol and the presence of God among them from the hand of a man dedicated to God and inhabited by God's power. The Ark was not a toy anymore, neither under a man's power toward God's presence. The Ark will travel with them, with Israel at the front of their processions, and God will remain an active combatant. He fought for Israel and could stop the sun moving so that He and Joshua would get all the killings done in daylight. Read the Prophet Joshua. Without the Ark, the Jericho massacre, the falling down flat of the whole in Jericho would have not been possible. Then there was a silence about the Ark after that period for a long time until we see the boy Samuel safely sleeping in the room with the Ark. The Ark was stolen by the Philistines who left it in the town called Baal Judah. That's where David decided to bring it to Jerusalem.

David wanted the Ark of God's throne in Jerusalem in the midst of His people, and that was His right place to be, not in another place, but with His people. David himself, from his very young age, a shepherd, felt the presence of God in his life. He fought and defeated the Philistines and won the city of Jerusalem later. With God, David never lost a battle. However, if God was powerful to make Israel win battles, He was also dangerous not only toward the enemies of Israel but also toward everyone who could not handle His presence in the Ark with appropriate care. If the transfer of the Ark in our passage today looked perfectly joyful, the verses 6-12A left out the rationale that it was not. Michal, King David's first wife and daughter of Saul despised the king from her window for publicly dancing before God. She mocked him in her heart, not publicly. We cannot evoke this as an incident affecting the parade. David had a very noble response to her telling her that he was dancing before God, he was dancing for God. The terrible incident that occurred was the killing of one of the drivers of the new cart carrying the Ark of God named Uzzah.

During the parade, the oxen slipped as the Ark of God was falling. We don't have the whole detail of how Uzzah handled the Ark rescuing it, but God got angry at him. His wrath fled up against Uzzah. He struck him down and Uzzah died there by the Ark of God. Again, we don't know the detail of how Uzzah handled the Ark of God. People were dancing all before the Ark, they couldn't see, even David, in that joyful moment. Uzzah was killed. It was dramatic. Fear and anger seized King David against God for killing Uzzah. He was deeply troubled wondering, "How can the Ark of the Lord come into my care?" David doubted to be a good steward for the Ark of God. He took the Ark to the home of a man named Obed-Edom, where the dangerous Ark stayed for three months. But the dangerous Ark became a blessing for the entire household of Obed-Edom, and David saw that. Maybe it is time to ask ourselves if it is God's otherness which is dangerous or our attitude that deprives us from His blessings? David organized a new parade to transfer the Ark to Jerusalem. We said earlier that David knew God from his childhood, but we are learning now that he still had to deepen his knowledge of God and maybe his knowledge of himself.

And life events are the best occasions to learn who God is and who we are. What about us? We may have been angry at God like David, and now we are back to him. Peter said to Jesus at his time, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" You have the words of eternal life. What did we learn? During this event, David also performed priestly functions that Bible expert wonder if he did not go beyond the limits of his power as a king, giving himself unlimited power. The only function David did not and could not perform in his life was to confront like the Prophet Nathan did to him at one of his reign, bringing him in a very strategic and professional way to accept his fault of taking the wife of his soldier and killing him. David confessed his sin. He repented. We understand his attitude toward the Ark today. It is a common humans' attitude towards holy characterizes by fear and attraction or fascination. We see that clearly in our gospel today before King Herod Antipas, although different from King David. Contrary to King David, Herod did not accept his sin and repent. John the Baptist presented Herod his sin more than once. He reminded him that it was not lawful to take his brother's wife.

By ordering the killing of John, Herod showed that he had given himself an absolute power, unlimited power, that no one would exercise or restraint on it. John the Baptist had to respond to his call as a prophet. He was brave enough to try to restrain Herod. He fearlessly told him the truth. The good thing was that John the Baptist was not a member of Herod's government to be fired and replaced by somebody else ready to bless the unacceptable. John was a prophet, and coming from far, he could not betray who he was. John came as the Herod of the Messiah. The first human to witness to Jesus from his mom's womb, and later to bear witness to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the

word. John had the function to prepare the Israelite for the coming of their king. Herod was one of them, he was not above the law. John assumed that function and responsibility. He became specific in denouncing sin and sin of the adulterous lifestyle of Herod. John assumed his goal. Jesus will honor him saying, "Among those born of women, there is no one greater than John." Herod's arrangement with Herodias was unlawful as adulterous. But also Leviticus 20:21, sexual relationship with one's brother's wife was prohibited.

John could not tolerate that or go around it in his ministry. Mark tells us that Herod will have a never killed John, saying that Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. Again, Herod, like David, had this human reaction toward holiness, fear, and fascination. His fear before John was only related to John's holiness, to John's righteousness. John had any other power. "When Herod heard John," Mark said, "He was greatly perplexed, and yet liked to listen to him." He was both fearful of John, and drawn to him. How could he kill him? Our human conscience can be distorted, but Herod's conscience, that divine law written in our heart, as St. Paul called it, work to the aid. Herod probably never slept well after the execution of John to preserve his bride. Mark said that when Herod heard the girl telling him, "I want you to give me, at once, the head of John the Baptist on a platter," the king was a deeply grieved. He was not expecting that. Yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her.

Herod failed to tell her the answer to the girl, that human life is sacred, and that only God has power on it. What brought him to kill John was the oath, or vows, that are not seriously taken or respected today. We take them before nation, before the church, and before God today, and tomorrow we get rid of them before the lawyer. Another serious point I will simply evoke here is the silence, the silence of the guests, the upper-class of the Galilean society. What a birthday party. On one hand, a plate with cakes, and on the other, a head. The platter handed over to a little girl, destroying her life for ever, and this dignitaries sitting mouth closed. What about us and our society? Do we remain silent while authorities like Herod destroy moral values and the truth before the eyes of our children, or when lying become like value to a victory exposed all over? Will a party like Herod's be horrific in our American society?