

Over the past few weeks we have been learning about the early days of Israel when they were ruled by kings. We have heard about Saul being the first king and then David succeeding him. We heard the stories of how Saul was jealous of David and tried to have him killed.

Last week we heard that Saul died and David was anointed king over all of Israel and Judah and that he would rule for 40 years. This period of a united monarchy under David's rule is considered the high point of Israel's power in the region. Today we are going to read a story from the beginning of David's rule which is going to combine cultural and religious elements.

David needed a symbol to unite the people and to show the people that his leadership was blessed by God. So David turned to a symbol from Israel's history which was a very important manifestation of God's presence and blessing. David sent for the Ark of the Covenant.

To make sure of what we are talking about, the Ark of the Covenant is not Noah's Ark. Noah's Ark was a big boat described in Genesis. The Ark of the Covenant was a box or a chest that it was believed held the two tablets that contained the Ten Commandments.

The ark came to represent the presence of God and was an important symbol to the Israelite people. Throughout scripture the ark is described as more than a symbol but as the actual manifestation of God.

Any of you that remember the movie "Raiders of the Lost Ark" know that Harrison Ford's character was an archaeologist who went in search of the Ark. The movie had a realistic depiction of a box on two poles that were used to carry the ark from one place to the next.

The Ark in both the Bible and in the Harrison Ford movie was both a blessing and a curse. In the Bible, the Philistines possessed the Ark for a while but discarded it when bad things happened to them.

In a bizarre and disturbing encounter in 2 Samuel, a man named Uzzah is killed when he tries to reach out and balance the Ark. And, if you saw the movie “Raiders of the Lost Ark,” you know that the Nazis saw their skin melted and the people killed who wanted the Ark for evil intent.

Today we will be reading the story of David bringing the Ark into Jerusalem. This will be his symbol connecting the people to God and affirming his blessing from God to be their king.

Read 2 Samuel 6:1-5

The Ark comes to represent God who connects the Israelites to their past and to their present. It is a comforting symbol that reminds them of something important from their past to give them strength for today.

We have symbols that are important to us as well. We have objects or pictures that we keep around that remind us of something important from our past. And these objects mean something only to the one who is choosing to retain them. These objects or pictures mean little to nothing to anyone else.

I sent out an email this week and invited people to bring objects or pictures which are important to you for some reason. I have brought some of the many objects which you will find in my office. They remind me of important moments in my life. These memories are important because they help to sustain me today.

So I am going to share a couple of the items from my bag and then invite any of you to share your special item. If you did not bring a special item but you are comfortable talking about it, you can do that as well.

I share about the items that I brought.

These objects which we have discussed are very important to the one who is choosing to keep them. And that's OK. It's OK to keep items that remind us of important memories.

These memories connect us to others and ultimately they connect us to God. Because these objects hold a spiritual presence that no one else can truly understand. And that is why it is important to hear about why they are important to you.

But we do need to be careful that the objects do not become idols. I am reminded of a friend of mine telling the story of the church he attended in Columbia. He chaired the Building and Grounds Committee and in their gym was a basketball goal that aged to the point that it was unsightly. He got a couple of volunteers to take the goal down.

The next Sunday at church an elderly member of the congregation approached my friend and told him that the basketball goal was given in memory of her husband. My friend chose to put the goal back up even though it was no longer useful to anyone.

Sometimes our objects of memory can become our idols of worship. I wonder now if my friend should have listened to this woman talk about her husband and then find a new way to honor his memory.

I know that there will come a day when I will need to clean out my office for good. And I will offer to my kids and others anything out of my office that provides an important memory.

But I know that many of the items that I cherish are items that will end up being donated or end up in the trash bin. These items are important only in their relationship to me.

The Ark of the Covenant was a useful reminder to the Israelites that God was with them on their journey. But there came a time for them to move on from the wooden box and find other ways to affirm the presence of God in their lives.

Passing along symbols is important. But ultimately they are only that. Symbols. Symbols are important but what is ultimately sustainable to us is the knowledge that God is with us through our life's journeys.

God is with us to provide us the reassurance that we need. God is with us to direct us down the path that we are called to go.

We thank God for our symbols of importance. We celebrate the moments when we can hold them close to us and we find the time to grieve when it is time to discard of them.

After all, it is not the symbol that carries the ultimate importance.

What carries the ultimate importance is acknowledging the presence of God in our history, in our present, and in our future. AMEN.

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