

**United Church of Fayetteville**  
**310 E. Genesee Street**  
**Fayetteville, NY 13066**  
**July 12, 2009**  
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**THE LIMITS OF POWER (Mark 6:1-6)**

**PROPER ABANDON (2 Samuel 6:1-5; 12b-19)**

I have never served on a pastoral nominating committee, so I am not certain what it is they learn or hope to learn from the handful of sermons they hear before making an offer. Most of what you can learn about a preacher's handling of Scriptures, their affections or disaffections, and interpretive lens can only be learned over time. By now, you have learned some things about me: I have particular affection for the stories of Hebrew Scripture; and do not enjoy Paul's arguments. And, I confess, that David is my favorite person in all of Scripture. I find him intriguing, energizing, challenging, complex, tragically flawed, extraordinarily faithful, larger than life and oh, so very human. I am certainly not alone in my fascination. There are more pages in Scripture discussing David and telling stories of his life and reign than there are of Jesus.

It's not just David's person, but the implications his reign had for people of faith as in later years, when they looked for someone to restore his kingdom and what it meant for their expectations when Jesus was understood to be that person.

If David appears in the lectionary, you can be reasonably certain that's what I'll be preaching. I'd chosen to preach on this text before *Newsweek's* cover story appeared this week on the styles of leadership – charismatic, traditional or bureaucratic. Across the span of his career, David used all three. As the article argued and history proves, finally the measure of a leader is not their style but what they accomplish with it. By any measure, David was a great leader, and today's text finds him on the cups between two styles.

David's story is so long, complex and interwoven with the people of Israel and indeed all peoples of faith, that we can usually choose only one element at a time. As does today's, even the smallest incident requires some history and explanation of circumstances.

In his early years and even up through today's story, David was a highly charismatic young man, who drew people to himself because of his gifts, his faithfulness, his vivacity and not least, his success in leading his men to military victory. He was the favorite of Saul, Israel's first king, until Saul's deteriorating mental health and David's rising popularity destroyed their relationship.

David began building his alliances the old fashioned way – by marrying King Saul's daughter – Michal – another way to secure the throne after Saul's death. That was a wise political move. (We can assume that, from fairly early on, David had some savvy political counselors, as well as generous biographers.) The normal way in the world at the time for obtaining a throne was to inherit it from your father. The next best way would be to engage a successful coup. However, Israel, at least for these first two kings, had looked to the prophet Samuel to anoint its kings – a sort of compromise between them and their God, when the Israelites had asked for a king like other nations. Now, the Israelites had a king like other nations, even if their king was chosen in a more unorthodox way. But, after all, you have to start somewhere.

By now, David is a boy no longer, but a young man, who has left the nomadic herding and military lives he has known and established his capital in Jerusalem. There is not a lot of dissension about his rule. He hasn't yet laid eyes on Bathsheba. Taxes haven't risen. He doesn't have the multiple wives and children to bicker and connive over his power and wealth. Israel's neighbors are not threats. These are indeed idyllic days to be king of Israel.

But this kingdom on earth thing is still new to Israel and David wants to stabilize it further. He and his advisors notice that all the other kings keep company with their gods in their capital cities. They remember that the ark of the presence of God, which long traveled with the people, has been sitting, forgotten, in the hinterlands these last twenty years. What greater endorsement of David's reign could there be than the presence of God in his capital city? So it is arranged that the ark of the presence shall be brought to David's city, Jerusalem.

It is not an uneventful journey for the ark, as David is reminded that it might be his city, but that he is God's man – it is not the other way around. One can know the blessings and presence of God, but dare not even hope to control God. At last, however, the proper relationship between God and king re-established, the ark is brought into Jerusalem in triumphant celebratory procession.

What a parade, it is! There are horses and chariots, music and throngs of people cheering along the way, as the presence of God enters their city, with all its presumed blessings. David is both leading the celebration and caught up in it. Here he is, with his God whom he has served faithfully, daringly and well and whom he loves greatly, in the same city, his capital city, where he will be shepherd to God's people. He cannot contain his joy and his gratitude to God. His red hair flashing in the sun, David's dancing becomes more energetic. He flings his clothes away, spinning more wildly into and among the crowd.

The people love it! David might be king, but he is still one of them and he is still the Lord's man – a king like other nations have, but not like other nations have. They indeed have the best of both worlds, this charismatic young man, who loves God and cares for them. For this wild, partying king ends the day -- as must all those who are called to serve the Lord -- by serving the people. After the proper reception of the ark of the presence of God into the tent he has pitched for it, David serves a meal to all the city. So ends the party.

David and indeed all of Israel, might have been new to kingship, but all their neighbors had had royal rulers for many years. They knew the royal trappings and the way kings were supposed to behave. And if the people loved David's dancing that day, his letting go of control, there was one who did not. His wife, Michal, daughter of Saul, knew kings' proper behavior and none of it included dancing nearly naked in the streets with the people. Michal later told David of her disgust. The story's narrator implies that David and Michal's relationship never healed beyond this breach. As a result, in her bitterness, Michal never bore a child. Her barrenness became a symbol of the passing of the world she knew, and of the traditional way Israel chose its kings.

In fact, the entrance of the ark of the presence of God not Jerusalem marked the beginning of David's transition from a charismatic to a more bureaucratic style of leadership. Whether he had any idea or not of the changes being wrought, David marked the transition with abandon – not just abandon of what some, or at least Michal, might think of as proper kingly behavior, but abandon of control. Despite Michal's criticism, it was, in fact, a proper abandon. For in those moments, David let himself be caught up in the Spirit, worshiping with a glad adoration that is enviable for its spontaneity and joy. I suspect that one of the reasons David's story resonates through the ages, is that from beginning to end, whether dancing in the streets or throwing himself flat on the ground beseeching God's mercy, David never lost the capacity to lose himself entirely to the worship of God, to properly abandon those parts of himself -- his pride, his self-reliance on incredible gifts – David was able to abandon whatever it was that separated from God. Again and again, throughout his life, through transitions from joy to sorrow, success and defeat, guilt and glory, in the dawn of a new day and on his death bed – it was through a worshipful abandon David connected with the God who was indeed the source of all his life's joy and possibility.

It is through that same worshipful abandon that we can reconnect with our God, living faithful lives through joy and change, success and sorrow. Am I suggesting that we literally need to become drama kings and queens, dancing naked in the streets and throwing ourselves prostrate across the pews? Of course, not. I am still Presbyterian, after all:- )

Besides, such abandon does not come without practice – the practice of regular worship and praise – of intentionally connecting ourselves to one another and to the divine – opening ourselves to a Spirit larger than ours and a power greater than ours. We don't worship because it is something God needs from us. We need worship in order to be fully human as we were created to be. Like David, the more we worship, the more we will find that we can let ourselves go in the Spirit, the more we can trust ourselves to ride the breath of God. Then we may find ourselves more David-like in another way -- finding ourselves carried through times of transition and change, lifted above even moments of stultifying predictability to the joyful faithful abandon of ones lost in the wonder, love and praise of God. As it was for David, may it be so for us. Amen.