

Wesley United Methodist Church

July 12, 2015

"Standing On Your Head for God."

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12-19

Nestled in the mountains of Vermont, in the town of Rupert, is a two-hundred-year-old church. Howard Mudgett has written a history of this church. In the records that, in 1831, the citizens of Rupert first added a steeple and bell to their church. But something unusual happened, "When the steeple was added," Mudgett writes, "one agile Lyman Woodard stood on his head in the belfry with his feet toward heaven."

Not much else is known about Lyman Woodard. He is remembered only for the minor stunt that he pulled over a hundred eighty years ago. Lyman was so excited about the improvement to his church that he had to find some way to express it. Probably wasn't enough room to dance in the belfry. He was celebrating the victory of God.

Wonder what Lyman Woodard's standing on his head in a belfry has to do with our Scripture? Well, let's get into the story. King David was realizing his vision for Israel. He was at the peak of his power and popularity. He had defeated long-standing enemies and united his people something that no one else had ever been able to do. It was a moment of euphoria.

And in order to complete his vision, David decided to move the famed Ark of the Covenant, which was believed to contain the two stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments and Aaron's rod, to Jerusalem. The Ark was a symbol of national pride for the Israelites, as well as a sign of the presence of God. Its presence in Jerusalem would inspire David's people for generations.

Okay, David had a vision. Astounding things happen when someone has a vision. It can capture our imaginations and unite us in a common purpose. It can become a rallying point that leads into action. That has been true throughout history. One only has to look at one of the most beautiful cities in the world for confirmation. Vienna, Austria is home to the magnificent St. Stephen's Cathedral which has stood at the heart of the city since the thirteenth century. But during the Second World War it was nearly destroyed when it was caught in the crossfire of opposing armies fighting possession of the city.

After the war there wasn't much left of Vienna left. Thousands of homes were destroyed. There was barely enough food to keep the people fed. The economy was in shambles. There wasn't much for the people to find comfort in, but guess what they did first? They began rebuilding their beloved cathedral. And that kept them going. They worked hard to remove the rubble from the cathedral, even though they were hungry. Funds were raised to restore and rebuild the cathedral, even though the country was almost bankrupt. The cathedral became a symbol of Vienna's determination to survive and prosper through the dark years ahead.

We need visions to capture our imaginations and give us hope. The prophet of old said, 'Where there is no vision, the people perish.'

We in this church need a vision. We need a vision of what God will do if we open ourselves to his leadership. We need a vision that will call us to renewal. But, we also need something else: We need to make sure that our vision is God's vision.

When King David decided to move the Ark to Jerusalem, he was taking a significant step. But he took it without seeking the will of God, and tragedy occurred. While David and his soldiers were transporting the Ark, the cart it was resting on shifted, and David's friend Uzzah reached out to prevent it from falling. But when Uzzah touched the holy Ark of the Covenant, he was instantly killed. King David was devastated.

This tragedy halted the movement of the Ark and forced David to reevaluate his plans. Only then did he consult with God. Unfortunately, we often find ourselves doing the same thing. When we are successful we think we don't need to consult with God before we make decisions. And then when something bad happens, we ask God what went wrong, and we want him to fix it.

If we were wise, we would consult God before we get ourselves into a bind. For God still has a vision for people today just as he did in David's day.

So King David waited three months with the Ark at the home of Obed-edom. waiting to learn and accept God's vision. And, finally, he received it: The home of Obed-edom began to receive an abundance of blessings through the presence of the Ark. David interpreted this to mean that God was behind his plan; or rather, that his plan was in accordance with God's. The Ark was then taken up again, and it was carried the rest of the way to Jerusalem.

Then something most interesting happened. David began to dance around the Ark. He simply could not contain himself. Like Lyman Woodard standing on his head in that New England Belfry, David burst loose with a display of reckless exuberance. It was truly a time of celebration. David's dancing was so wild and exuberant that he embarrassed his wife. But he was dancing for the Lord, and he was dancing because he had brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem according to his vision and according to God's will.

This brings us to the realization that, when we see a vision become reality, our hearts are filled with joy. That is one reason we need a vision because of the joy we receive from its accomplishment. We might not stand on our heads or dance in the isles before the altar, but there need to be times when we celebrate a great victory of God.

Some years ago, Tony Campolo was invited to preach at a Lutheran Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. A few days before, he had been the speaker at a nearby inspirational music festival, and some of the young people who were at the festival decided to travel to Lancaster to hear Dr. Campolo preach there as well. The church that evening was packed with young people.

When the pastor began the service, he called the people to worship by saying, "Let us make a joyful noise unto the Lord! Let us come to His gates with Thanksgiving and into his courts with praise!" Imagine that Lutheran pastor's surprise when someone in the balcony jumped up and yelled, "All right! All right!" and started clapping. Before long there were several hundred young people on their feet shouting praise and applauding wildly. "I don't know what [the pastor] was expecting when he told the people in church to make a joyful noise unto the Lord," said Tony Campolo later, "but I do know that the last thing he expected that Sunday night was that anybody actually would!"

It is kind of sad that so many churches no longer expect to be joyful. We're so used to worshiping in somber silence that we never allow ourselves to be excited by our Christian faith. We need a new vision. We need a vision that comes from God. We need a vision that will set our pulse racing and our spirits soaring. King David followed his vision and united all Israelites. He followed God's vision when he brought home the Ark of the Covenant. Let's pray for a vision for our church and let's follow that vision, that we might dance for joy.