

July 12, 2909

The God's blessed household of Obed-Edom
2 Samuel 6:1-11

We have given this Sunday a special name, Yellow Ribbon Sunday, dedicated to encouraging those who serve in the military among our church family and community. Military service for national security and world peace is a very important role as the people of God, and those in military service in this country deserve to be recognized.

The yellow ribbon is a symbol of welcoming home. There are many versions of the story of the welcoming ribbon. One such story I heard is a story of two men in a railroad station, and goes like this:

There were two men at a railroad station. One of the men was so reserved that his companion had difficulty in persuading him to talk about himself. He was, he said at last, a convict returning from five years' imprisonment in a distant prison, but his people were too poor to visit him and were too uneducated to be very articulate on paper. Hence he had written to them to make a sign for him when he was released and came home. If they wanted him, they should put a yellow ribbon in the big apple tree which stood close to the railroad track at the bottom of the garden, and he would get off the train, but if they did not want him, they were to do nothing and he would stay on the train and seek a new life elsewhere. He said that they were nearing his home town and that he couldn't bear to look. His new friend said that he would look and took his place by the window to watch for the apple tree which the other had described to him.

In a minute he put a hand on his companion's arm. "There it is," he cried. "It's all right! The whole tree is yellow with ribbons." What a surprising exclamation! The ribbon is a sign of welcoming, encouraging, waiting for and longing for homecoming. Today, we are all here to send our message of support to those in military service by hanging yellow ribbons on the tree. It is not only a symbol of welcoming for soldiers but also for all those who have left home.

The oldest story of the yellow ribbon is a parable, the story of prodigal son in the gospel of Luke, chapter 15. In that story of the prodigal son, we find the dual messages of the Christian gospel: the acceptance and blessing by the Father.. The Father, signifying God's grace, accepts the son and holds a banquet for the returning son. Forgiveness of sin and blessing of His children are the dual messages of the grace of God. Therefore, we are also people of forgiving and people of blessing by God.

Blessing is one of the highest concerns among believers of every religion. Even non religious people refer to blessing. "God bless you!" is a popular statement outside of the context of church. We even say "God bless you" when some sneezes. Or, when we give a

little money to pan handlers on the street, the receivers respond back to us saying, “God bless you!”

From religion of common folk to “high” religion, blessing is a common interest among believers. When we travel to Asia, we can see many Buddhist temples where people offer money on the altars of the temple to ask blessing from their god. We cannot deny that we hope for blessing from God while we are worshipping Him.

The scripture reading from 2 Samuel 6:1-11 is a story of war and about a man named Obed-Edom. Obed-Edom was a gatekeeper of the south gate of the temple in the city of David. And also, he was a custodian of the sanctuary.

David defeated the Philistines in battle and brought back the Ark of God, which was taken by the Philistine army at a previous war. The Ark of God is a symbol of the presence of God.

David built a new city and wanted to restore the Ark to Israel bringing the Ark of God to reside in the city of David. David carried the Ark of God on a cart drawn by oxen from the land of the Philistines into the city of David. But, a problem occurred on the way to the city. When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah, who was one of those who had been guiding the cart of the Ark reached out and took a hold of the Ark when the Ark began to slip off of the cart when the oxen stumbled. The Lord’s anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act. Therefore, God struck him down and he died there beside the Ark of God.

After this awful accident, David began to hesitate about bringing the Ark of God into the city. So, Obed-Edom, a gatekeeper took the Ark of God to his house and where stayed for three months. While the Ark of God was staying at the house of Obed-Edom, God blessed Obed-Edom and his household because of the Ark. When David heard this news, David was encouraged and prompted to bring the Ark on into the city.

Today’s call to worship, which comes from Psalm 24:7-10, shows us a picture of how the people of David processed the Ark of God, transferring it to Jerusalem. Psalm 24:7-10 was the song that the people of Israel sang when the Ark of God entered into the city of David. Just outside the gate of the city, or doors of the temple, the celebrants heralded the arrival of the Ark, singing:

Lift up your heads, O gate!
And be lifted up, O Ancient Doors!
that the King of Glory may come in.
Who is this “King of Glory”?
The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O Gates!
and be lift up, O Ancient Doors!

that the King of Glory may come in.
Who is the “King of glory”?
The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of Glory! (Ps 24:7-10)

Early in its history, the Ark was closely associated with divine presence. The Ark led the people in their wanderings “to search for them a resting place”. Whenever the Ark proceeded, God would be addressed directly. By the same token, the homeward march of the Ark was initiated by the call of God to return. The martial language in these fragments of an ancient liturgy recalls the use of the Ark as a war palladium. The Ark was the place where the leaders of the tribes of Israel sought oracles for holy war.

The scripture reading from 2 Samuel 6:1-11 deepens our thought about sanctity and God’s blessing. Let’s pause together and consider where there is the sanctity of God in our life. There are two places: one is where there is worship of God, the other is in our heart, in which we believe in sanctity.

Several years ago I attended a spiritual healing seminar at the Double Tree Hotel. There were several hundred people gathered. The meeting was held in an auditorium in the hotel. At the door, I noticed a note which read, “This is the sanctuary of God.” It was a notice to me that the place was sanctified for worship and praise.

When I sat on the chair I felt some tiny grains like sand on my chair, so I changed seats. But, the next seat was the same. And the tiny sand-like grains were everywhere, not only seats but also on the whole floor. I found that those grains were not sand but tiny grains of salt. The people who planned the worship prepared the place for worship by sanctifying the place with salt. Salt is an element for sanctifying that is used in the Bible. I was delighted to find the salt in the worshipping place because it was a symbol that the place where the meeting was held not the same place that it used to be for its secular functions, in some sense.

Where is your sanctuary, sanctified place for meeting with God? We should have our own place to meet God designated just for fellowship with God. I don’t like to hold outdoor worship services for formal worship. This is because the park or some other place is not a sanctified place designated for worship, but rather a place for recreational fun. Worship has to be separated from play or recreation.

Blessing comes from God, moments with God, in a designated time and place for God, and through the commandment of God.

There was a rule when the Ark of God was to be transferred to other place. The Ark of God should not be carried by wagon or horse back. It should be carried by the shoulders of selected stewards or priests. But the people ignored the rule. The Ark of God was not to be touched improperly by unconsecrated people. That was that happened when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, and Uzzah reached out and took hold of the Ark. If the people believed that the Ark of God was the presence of God, they should be careful and full of awe when carrying the Ark.

Let's talk about Holy Communion. In the same way, if we believe Holy Communion as the mystic body of Christ, those who take communion should consider every element of communion as the symbolized and real body of Christ, and as a means of grace. The elements are no longer bread or juice when we take those elements as the body of Christ. The problem is what to believe and how believe about Holy Communion.

Basically, the left-over elements should not be destroyed or abandoned. During the preparation, the communion stewards handle the elements very carefully; full of awe, and prayerfully. Where there is sanctification, there is also blessing. That is our faith and attitude about Holy Communion.

The church I grew up in Korea had the rule that anybody standing on the altar area must take off their shoes because they designated the place as a holy place. There was an attitude among the congregation which held that place as separate and sacred place. When God called Moses on the mountain Moses approached the place where the bushes were burning. Then, Moses heard the voice of God, "Where you are standing is holy, take off your shoes!" Our real problem is that we don't have any holy place in which to take off our shoes.

In the time of Saul, the Ark was taken by the Philistine army. The army of Israel was defeated by the Philistine army because God's spirit had already left the people of Israel. Even though the Ark of God remained among the army of Israel, God's Spirit was not there because there was not a holy place in the peoples' hearts.

After being taken by the Philistines, the Ark was deposited in the temple of the Philistine god, Dagon, in Ashdod. The next day the Philistine priests found that, "Dagon had fallen with his face to the ground before the Ark of God." The wording recalls Joshua's gesture of penitence: "He fell face to the ground before the Ark of God." The Philistines raised the statue of Dagon. But again on the next day, "Dagon had fallen face to the ground before ark of God." This time, Dagon's head and both his hands were cut off. Thus, the hand of God was demonstrated against the god of the Philistines. The people of Ashdod concluded: "The Ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god."

The Ark of God is given to the people of God. To others it is meaningless and rather harmful. Sanctuary or Holy Communion is given to the people of God for their blessing. For those who do not believe the sanctuary or Holy Communion, it is meaningless and rather harmful.

What is the blessing of God? When and where does the blessing of God come from? In the sanctuary and when we worship God with whole our heart and mind and spirit and strength, the blessing of God comes. In the sanctuary we hear the words of God, bestowed by the Holy Spirit and find healing and restoration through the blessing of God.

God told us through the mouth of Jeremiah, “This is what the Lord says, he who made the earth, the Lord who formed it and established it – the Lord is his name: ‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’” God’s blessing is unsearchable, unthinkable and even unexpected things are granted to the people of God for sanctifying Him. Worship is sanctifying ourselves by giving Him what we have to praise and to give thanks