

“Throw Me Something Mister”; were those words really coming out of my mouth? I remember just 3 years before I had been standing at the back of the Mardi Gras crowd about a mile from downtown New Orleans watching my first Mardi Gras parade and I thought those people are really crazy, running up to each float yelling at the top of their lungs for people on the float to throw them something, anything, beads, doubloons, cups, trinkets, or candy. As I **observed** what was happening that first year I thought what would make people act so crazy?

Then the second year that we lived in the New Orleans area, Ken was working at a store in downtown near Bourbon and Canal Streets at the edge of the French Quarter. The store had a balcony overlooking the Mardi Gras parade route, so we were up on the balcony participating in all the craziness, even catching some of the most prized beads from Kirk Cameron, the celebrity who was the King of the parade that year.

But it was that third year when I found myself abandoning all proper behavior in the presence of the parade atmosphere. I had found myself a place at the front of the crowd and was all prepared to grab whatever beads, trinkets, doubloons, or candy was to be thrown at the crowd. Then that fateful moment came when I found myself yelling at the top of my lungs, “throw me something mister!” What had happened? In 3 short years I had gone from a casual observer to participant and finally to abandoning all proper behavior as I became one of those crazy people.

In our scripture lesson, there was quite the parade atmosphere as David began to bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. He had gathered 30,000 men to accompany him. Can you imagine that many people parading, shouting, singing and praising God? The scripture says, “David and **all** the people of Israel were celebrating before the Lord, singing songs and playing all kinds of musical instruments—lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets, and cymbals.”

Such a parade atmosphere surrounds the Holy presence of God that was within the Ark of the Covenant. How would you react if the Ark with the Holy presence of God was in your midst? Would you be shouting and singing, playing music or would you be bowed down in worship, or would you be trying to get close to it and touch it or would you be off to the side just observing it all, not being moved at all to respond to God’s holy presence?

Today’s scripture shows us three different ways of being in the presence of God: First of all we have David who was a true worshiper; he was a man after God’s own heart, having a passion and love for God. Just listen to a couple verses from the Psalms that reveal this, (Psalm

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9:1) “I will praise thee O Lord with my whole heart.” Psalm 103:1, “Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me bless his holy name.”

This love and passion for the presence of the Holy God made him abandon all proper behavior as he sang and danced before the Lord. He was really excited about bringing the ark into Jerusalem and he did not care what others thought of him.

But Michal, his wife who was also King Saul’s daughter, was just the opposite, she calmly stood looking out her window observing this parade coming into Jerusalem and she was horrified. David was acting like a crazy person, and she despised him in her heart. Listen to what happened when David got home. Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* says “David returned home to bless his family. Michal, Saul’s daughter, came out to greet him: “How wonderfully the king has distinguished himself today—exposing himself to the eyes of the servants’ maids like some burlesque street dancer!” David replied to Michal, “In GOD’s presence I’ll dance all I want! He chose me over your father and the rest of our family and made me prince over GOD’s people, over Israel. Oh yes, I’ll dance to GOD’s glory—more recklessly even than this. And as far as I’m concerned . . . I’ll gladly look like a fool . . . but among these maids you’re so worried about, I’ll be honored no end.”

The chapter ends saying “Michal, Saul’s daughter, was barren the rest of her life.” Being a judgmental observer affected her ability to conceive new life.

Thus far we have seen David the worshiper and Michal the Observer and now let’s look at Uzzah the participant. He is walking along side of the cart that is carrying the ark. Now if you go back to God’s instructions about carrying the Ark of the Covenant it will reveal that the Ark is to be carried by the Levites and priests on the two long poles, not on the cart that the sons of Abinadab used.

Carrying the holy presence of God is a risky thing. And Uzzah was risking his life when he reached out and touched the Ark of the holy presence. Even though he was only trying to keep it from falling off the cart he crossed a holy boundary. He has taken lightly an encounter with the Holy God of Israel. He is struck down by God for being irreverent and dies right then and there.

Do you realize that people come into a church worship service in much the same way that these three people have demonstrated? We have the true worshiper who is abandoned to God and who enters into the worship service with reverence and awe. When we lived in El Paso there

was a choir member who really wanted to sing but his voice was not the best. He asked to sing a solo one Sunday and chose to sing the song, *In This Very Room*. In a shaky voice he sang, much of the time, off key, but God used this worshiper who had abandoned all to do what he felt God was asking him to do. A visitor sitting in the front row, had tears running down her cheeks, God was touching her soul at a very deep level and I could see the interaction between her and the singer. God was doing a mighty work within this woman's spirit. I later found out that she was a music teacher, there to listen to one of her High School students perform an instrumental solo later in the service. God touched that music teacher with the love and passion of the Lord which the singer had. God works through those who will abandon all and follow him no matter what.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have those who come into a worship service just to observe what is going on. If someone becomes too worshipful and begins to abandon all to dance before the Lord, the observers often despise them because this change in behavior begins to usher in change in the church. It signals the end of the way things have always been, and the observer often wants to keep the old ways and will become very judgmental speaking up vehemently against any change.

In the middle between the worshiper and observer we have the participant trying to reach out and touch the holy in human terms, this is very risky. If the participant is unwilling to die to their own selfish ways they will try to manage the holy presence, making it fit into their human understanding. Then the participant will often try to exploit the power of God for their own gain, having one foot in God's presence and the other foot firmly planted in the world.

You might be asking yourself what this has to do with us and our world today. There has been a huge spiritual shift in this last month. We have been thrust into the biggest move of God the world has experienced. It is going to propel us forward to the billion-soul harvest that has been prayed for by many believers. Are we as a church ready for this?

One of the ways that might be helpful in answering that question is what each of us have found out about ourselves on the S.H.A.P.E. inventory. Take a good look at what your spiritual gifts are. Then look at your heart's desires, your abilities, personality type, and then your experiences. If you have been an observer perhaps you might want to try to become more involved as a participant by using your gifts to help this church live out our Christian mission, which is ***to be a worshiping and nurturing community of faith, relying on the Holy Spirit, the Bible, and each other to reach the world for Christ.***

If you already participate, perhaps you might want to enter into worshipping God by abandoning all, creating a spiritual atmosphere which invites the Holy Spirit to move within and around you at all times. We have entered the time where God's Holy breath is being breathed upon not only the church, but also upon those who are outside the church. People are seeking after the true, authentic encounter with the Holy presence of God. Many are in the younger generations who long for more than a routine worship service. They want to worship God in Spirit and in Truth.

There are people right now who are positioning themselves to be the worshipers, who will abandon all and follow our Lord Jesus Christ in order to see the breakthrough of this spiritual movement. It is the worshipers who are leading the way. The Ark of God's Holy presence is within **each believer** because we are truly the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Just think about it, our world is in chaos, the wars that are raging are not just physical wars between people, these wars also are a spiritual battle against spiritual forces of wickedness. The people who are the worshipers will create the sound from heaven that will defeat the forces of evil.

So where do you find yourself this morning?

Are you the Observer who is on the outside looking in, judging what is happening without discerning God's holy presence?

Are you the Participant who wants to risk touching the Holy but are drawn into the world's ways? If so, it may be time to die to your own will and do God's will which brings you into the joy of the Lord. You may need to abandon those things that limit God's presence so when God's presence is felt you are ready to dance.

Are you the worshiper who welcomes the presence of God? If so, you are blessed to be a blessing in the world doing God's will and abandoning all to be available for God to use your presence as a conduit for his presence to others, because God no longer lives in a box that must be carried by the priests and Levites. **God lives in each of us, his believers today. We are the "ark of His Holy Presence".**