“The New King in Town”

2 Samuel 5:1-5; 6:1-5; Psalm 150

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Every day at sunset the neighbors stop what they’re doing.

Every day at sunset there is a pause and a stillness.

Every day at sunset Don Brittain plays Taps on his trumpet.

The tune can be heard from his deck in Tacoma, Wa.

He wakes up each morning, checks the paper to see when sunset will be.

Then he practices that tune, perfecting it with great care.

This retired aerospace engineer has made this is daily devotion.

He does it to honor those serving in the military.

Brittain had polio as a child and was unable to serve in the military.

But his trumpet is his way of and honoring those who do.

His ritual is an effective way to call his neighbors to pause and reflect.

To take just one moment out of their day to stand at attention.

You can picture folks preparing dinner, stepping away from the stove to listen.

Some might be kicking off their shoes after a long day of work.

Others might be just getting out of bed, preparing for their night shift at work.

Whatever they are doing, the trumpet sound stops them in their tracks.

I would imagine there are some neighbors who don’t like this ritual.

Perhaps they shut themselves inside where they can’t hear it.

I wonder if any of them have written letters of complaint.

But those who were interviewed for a story on CBS said it is the most poignant melody they’ve ever heard.

They call it beautiful.

And emotional.

These neighbors say how grateful they are for this small reminder of what they’ve been blessed with.

It is such a small gesture.

And yet it is making a remarkable impact on his neighbors.

He helps them break up their hectic days, reminding them to stop.

Helping them reflect and even honor those who protect them.

He is helping others think about the important things in life.

In this way, Brittain is helping a community think outside of themselves and unite in a ritual that offers a chance to refocus.

The people of Israel needed a similar call to unite and refocus their attention.

This nation was in shambles.

Several years before, the Ark of the Covenant had been stolen by Philistines.

It was taken from the Israelites, dragging with it their reminder of God’s law and covenant.

As a result, they started to stray from their faithfulness to God.

Turning their attention elsewhere.

After a time of Judges providing them with leadership, the people demanded a king.

They thought a political leader, rather than a spiritual one would solve their problems.

It didn’t.

Saul was elected as their first king and he reigned with corruption and abuse.

The people lived in terror under his rule and their lives were in disarray.

Then things got really ugly when a civil war broke out.

They were torn in two and a bloody fight ensued.

The nation was divided.

Israel was experiencing chaos.

They were unable to unite and focus their attention on what mattered.

And then along came David.

Now, if you know anything about David, you know he was not a perfect guy.

He went from being the boy who defeated a giant, to a man who killed in order to steal his wife.

David’s resume is filled with less than ideal behavior.

But, David was just what Israel needed.

The South, led by their king David, won the civil war and the two sides reunited.

They found common ground under the leadership of David.

Because David was different.

Unlike Saul, he didn’t rule with intimidation and oppression.

He opted to rule with integrity and a proper reverence for God.

In spite of the poor personal choices he made, he was a decent king.

He ruled with justice and with equity.

Ensuring a good life for his people.

Perhaps one of the most important elements of David’s reign was his faithfulness to God.

It was evident in the decisions he made.

And in the many times we see him go to God in prayer and often dancing in praise to God.

David’s devotion to God is clear from the start of his time as king.

One of the very first tasks he performed was bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to the people.

This is part of the story we hear this morning.

After it was reclaimed from the Philistines, it was tucked away somewhere out of sight.

Likely collecting dust from years in storage.

Remembering the importance of this ark, containing the two tablets of the law, David brings it back front and center.

With great ceremony and a shiny new cart to carry it on, the Israelites bring back the Ark.

This wasn’t just a fancy piece of furniture.

Some relic from their past.

The Ark of the Covenant contained the law of God – a physical reminder of God’s law.

But it bore a symbolic presence of God as well.

So essentially, David is bringing God back into the center of Israel.

He reminds the people of their need to unite and refocus their attention.

David gave them this poignant reminder that God is, was and always will be in the center of everything.

Whether the Israelites acknowledged it in those troublesome years.

Even when they failed to remember their covenant with God.

The Ark, placed front and center, reminded the people of God that they belonged to God.

That no matter what, God would be with them.

Eventually David moves the ark into Jerusalem where they build the temple and the palace.

They made that city a political, economic and spiritual center.

It would become the Holy City where all of the major action took place.

All because David insisted on bringing back the Ark of the Covenant, helping the people to focus on God.

David’s reign can be labeled the “golden age” of Israel’s kingship.

He did such a fine job of keeping God in the center.

He created a challenge for future kings to follow in his footsteps.

In fact, none of his predecessors would be able to compare to his success in keeping God at the center of Israel.

The kings that would come after David would struggle.

Their focus turning away from God, despite the prophets warning them to be faithful.

After the reign of David, the rest of the Old Testament is filled with the struggle of the people of God.

We see them under new leadership.

Ruled by kings who refused to make God the center of all they do.

And as a result they struggled and suffered for years.

They couldn’t quite replicate those golden years under David’s rule.

When God was very clearly at the center of everything.

We in the church continue to struggle with this act of remembering that God is in the center.

In the center of everything going on in the world.

In the center of everything going on in the Church.

We get distracted by the things we think are important.

We let politics and trends take our focus away.

This is pretty apparent in the number of conflicts the Church finds itself battling.

This isn’t a new situation.

Ever since the Church was created after Jesus was resurrected, there have been conflicts and splits.

The Church has broken into pieces time and time again.

Creating new denominations.

Fragmenting the Body of Christ and losing focus on God at the

center.

Today the Church has disagreements on how to conduct worship.

How to theologically explain who and what Jesus is for us.

Our understanding of salvation and eternal life.

These are just a few of the big ticket items we get in a huff about.

And then there are the smaller conflicts that happen in each congregation.

We argue about how to spend the money in the church budget.

We disagree over the color of the carpet and the paint on the walls.

We squabble over hymns verses contemporary praise music.

Each of these issues takes our focus away from the fact that God is at the center of all that we do.

And that all that we do, ought to center around God and proper worship and adoration of God.

This weekend the Presbytery met at Presbyterian Pan America School in Kingsville.

We were blessed by their hospitality.

It is home to 160 students from all over the world.

They come from nations like Mexico, China, South Korea, Rwanda, Niger, Taiwan, Venezuela.

These students receive a quality education, with a Christian focused curriculum.

Part of their campus life is worship in the chapel 3 times a week.

Now, when you gather 160 students from all over the world, just imagine the array of worship styles and theologies that they bring into that chapel.

They come from various religions in addition to Christianity.

And the campus chaplain is charged with the task of planning meaningful worship in the chapel, three times a week.

What a daunting endeavor.

And yet, the President of the school said they make it work.

They manage to gather the students three times a week and offer a time of worship and spiritual reflection.

Even though the students speak different languages and come from different backgrounds.

They find a way to remember that God is at the center of all they do.

And that God can transcend any disagreements they have about how to do worship and be a united group.

If that group of students can find a way to unite and focus their attention on God, surely a relatively homogenous group like us Presbyterians can manage to do the same.

The trick is to remember that we are the Body of Christ.

We are told that where two or three or more are gathered, God will be there.

Those two or three or more people might not agree on much, but their common denominator is God.

God’s presence is found in community.

When we gather together, united and focused.

The people of Israel needed the Ark of the Covenant to serve as a physical reminder of God’s presence.

They needed it front and center, to really grab their attention.

When David set the Ark in its place in Jerusalem, he was doing exactly what Don Brittain does each evening when he plays taps for his neighborhood.

He was calling the people to unite and refocus their attention.

We don’t need the Ark of the Covenant anymore.

We don’t need that physical reminder that God is in our midst.

Our reminder is revealed every time we gather as the church, united in Christ.

Our reminder is revealed every time we worship God, focusing our attention on our Creator.

During these harmonious moments when we are living out our call to be the Body of Christ, we see bright as day that God is indeed at the center.

Amen .