

## Epiphany Dedication

6 June 2006, 5:30 pm

2 Samuel 6:12-15, 17-19; Ps 84; 1Cor 3:1-11, 16-17; Matt 7:13-14, 24-25

Welcome to all who have gathered to celebrate this wonderful event! This night represents the culmination of years of dreaming, the labors of countless people, and the prayers of people here in Las Vegas and all across the diocese. Today is the day we say welcome home, both to those who have been wandering for many years, and to those who have not yet crossed this threshold. May this faith community become a home for wanderers not yet known to any of us.

When God moved houses in ancient Israel, the parade went on for days and even the king went out to lead the procession, with brass and court officials and dancing. But there is another story behind what we heard in that reading from Samuel. The verses that are omitted, and the ones that immediately follow, tell a story that would be very much at home in Las Vegas. David's dancing has been rather more akin to what one might see down on the Strip, and his wife Michal is mighty angry! A linen ephod was pretty skimpy and/or pretty revealing, and she accuses him of dancing for the benefit of the serving women, rather than for the glory of God. She seems to be both jealous and embarrassed. Well, I don't think we're going to see anything like David's dance tonight, but there is just as much passion and enthusiasm in the midst of this holy house-warming.

This congregation shares a good deal with ancient Israel. This newest home for Epiphany is one in a series of shelters. Like the ark, which David left in a foreigner's house for a season, you too have been on a long and wandering journey. You began in living rooms and police stations ("check your gun at the desk"), you had sojourns in a hospital and middle school, and you will likely have another home after this one. You will grow stronger in this place, and God willing, you will bless this house and those around it in the same way the household of Obed-edom was blessed.

Your life here will be challenging and it will be comforting (in the sense that that word means to strengthen). You will love each other and you will fight with each other. Both can be blessings. You will continue to discover new gifts in each other as well as things you find hard to call gifts. You will welcome people who are easy blessings and folks whom you may want to label "EGR: extra grace required." As you settle into this place you will find new growing edges that will take different skills to navigate, and your leadership will grow and shift.

There will be times when you assume that someone else's motives are mixed, like David and his dancing. That virile young king probably had some idea what his exhibitionist parade might elicit, even if his conscious or rationalized understanding was to glorify God. Maybe our motives are always mixed, at least this side of the grave. Yet if Jesus' story can tell us nothing else, it is that God can use even the world's worst intentions to bring about new life.

There will be some among us, and perhaps there is a piece within us all, that insists that this place become a new ark, a new temple, and that particular traditions will be required to make this place seem even more holy. Hold those urges lightly. Yes, this building is like a temple, and it is like the house of Obed-edom, and yet this place is only an icon, a window, to help us see God at work in the world about us. As Paul says so plainly to the Corinthians, we human beings are God's temple. We show each other and the world a window on God's workings. The danger comes when we insist that we alone are that window, or that this building or way of worshiping is the only permissible window.

If Epiphany is going to be around 10 or 20 or even 50 years from now, this community will have to be like a house built on rock, but not bricked up – the doors must be open to welcome the wanderer, and the walls must be permeable enough to let the windy breath of God blow in and out. How else can this Body live, unless it breathes, and unless it breathes deeply of holy spirit? If you want to continue to build this house, trust the rock, not this building. Fling open the doors, welcome everyone who wants to look or come in, but then go out into the streets and listen. Who is searching, and for what? Who hurts? Who wants to dance? And who is jealous because of her partner’s dancing? Offer sanctuary in that moment of encounter, and you will be building this house into one that can welcome and bless the world.

Your task is to keep on growing – not just in numbers, but in the strength of your faith, and in the vulnerability to welcome those without. One of my favorite writers, Tom Ehrich, put it like this in his blog today: “You can insist on speaking in church language – preaching about sacraments, parading Greek words, teaching Bible as you learned it, promoting church causes, maintaining the institution. Some will join you in that language... Some will agree to channel their fears and worries into church-defined causes and then be disappointed when life isn’t transformed.

“Or you can learn the languages of [the people around you]. You can learn about banking, manufacturing, schools, camps, retirement options, and the languages of their hearts. Little of that will be expressed in church language. So you will need to be a listener, not a speaker.

“In time, they will invite you to their homeland.” [*On a Journey*, [www.onajourney.org](http://www.onajourney.org)]

If we are going to be a place of welcome and transformation, we need to learn to build sanctuaries out there, in the street and the workplace and the coffee shop and the daycare center.

Epiphany’s work is to remember why you are here – and discover what the particulars of that vocation are. When the bishop next comes to visit, how will you answer those mission questions: Who are you? Why are you here? And what are you doing about it? The answers should not be the same a year from now as they are today, and they won’t be the same five or ten years from now.

The restlessness that you have known on your journey to this place is a gift. Don’t lose it or let go of it. Let it bless you with an unwillingness to sit still and be too comfortable. Keep on dreaming, and don’t stop with small dreams.

Maybe your job is to be a community of hope for 100,000 people at this end of the valley. Maybe your work is to be a daily home for latchkey children or for pleasantly confused seniors. Maybe you’re meant to bring hope to people who work too hard and play too hard and find no meaning in life. Maybe you are the voice who can echo Augustine, “our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they find their rest in you.”

May God bless this church of epiphany with restlessness until God’s love is visible all around. May you become a living ark, filled with the presence of God. And may you be windows that reveal God to the world.

Oh, and never stop dancing – it’s always an appropriate way to celebrate the presence of God!