

Day 37 – Mar. 21

As a kid, one of my favorite movies was “Raiders of the Lost Ark”. It scared the willies out of me when I first saw it (I had a thing with skeletons, and it has plenty!) but all in all, I loved the action, the tie in to history, and most of all the Ark of the Covenant. It was one of those times when something I’d learned about at church popped up in my non-church life. The unfortunate reality that my church life and non-church life were so divorced is a topic for another day.

Today, we focus on the Ark of the Covenant. With David finally establishing himself in Jerusalem, king over both Judah AND Israel, he sends for the ark. But along the way, unfortunate Uzziah tries to keep it from toppling off the cart and touches it. As we saw in Raiders, touching the ark has pretty dire consequences! Well, the movie was just a movie, but we’ve already seen the power of the Ark itself (remember Dagon, the idol who fell face down before the ark and lost his hands?) Uzziah dies for touching the ark, and we are left wondering. How is this justice? He was trying to help and was punished for it? We cry Foul on God for this one.

But was this God’s intentional lashing out at Uzziah for breaking a rule, no matter how innocently? Is this like the man stoned to death for picking up sticks on the Sabbath, seemingly equally innocently? I tend to think not. The Ark was the vessel of the Glory of God, the Shekeinah we’ve discussed previously. This power from God, uncontained and unfiltered, was too much for humankind, and so “no one may look on the face of God and live”. I believe poor Uzziah was a victim of the sheer power of God manifest in the ark. I’ve described humans before God as tissue paper before a raging forest fire. This was less God the Sherriff doling out justice and more God the Fire emanating heat that burns those nearby. The description of God’s anger burning against him was our human interpretation of the events, imho. This seems more likely given Jesus’ own words when He spoke to the breaking of the law when the disciples picked grain on the Sabbath. Laws, He said, are for us, not us for the laws.

Today, many think of God as powerless in the face of the world catastrophes we’re observing, from COVID to climate change to social evils like racism and hatred. The problem of evil (“How can a loving God cause or allow such evil and pain as this world knows?”) causes many to turn away from God and decide He is powerless. But God is not powerless but rather patient. We will know His power again, but on His timescale, not ours. This is an important work of Jesus, to allow us to come to God, draw near to Him, even look on God’s very face, and not die in spite of standing face to face with the full power of God. Jesus is God and Human, 100% of each, and it is in this mystery that we put our trust, in Jesus Christ, God in full power standing in our midst. I pray we are not like Uzziah who pay for coming too close to the Power of God. May we be instead like the disciples at the Transfiguration, witness to God’s power in Jesus Christ.