

July 11, Ordinary 15B (2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19)

The gap in the lectionary's account of the return of the Ark of the Covenant echoes a pattern we have seen too often in our country.

by [Yvette Schock](#) in the [June 30, 2021](#) issue

In Gabriel García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, José Arcadio Segundo is the only survivor of a massacre. When soldiers open fire on a demonstration, he is hit and loses consciousness. He awakes on a train, packed among thousands of bodies bound for clandestine burial at sea. He jumps off and begins the long walk home, stopping when he reaches a house just outside his town, where a woman tends his wound and washes his bloodied clothes.

When Arcadio Segundo says what he has witnessed, she refuses to believe him: "There haven't been any dead here," she said. "Since the time of your uncle, the colonel, nothing has happened in Macondo." His own brother does not believe him either, and anyone who does speak of the events tells an entirely different story: "There were no dead, the satisfied workers had gone back to their families, and the banana company was suspending all activity until the rains stopped."

There is a hole in the story of King David moving the Ark of the Covenant into his new capital. It's possible to glide right over it, if one doesn't pay attention to the verse numbers in the assigned reading. But once you know there's something uncomfortable hiding in the gap, there is a distinct "before" and "after" quality to the reading.

Before: Uzzah and Ahio walk proudly to their places at the cart carrying the ark, eager to take their role. There is a festive buzz in the air as the band begins to play, the cart moves forward, and "the whole house of Israel" dances with their king in a flash mob of joy and reverence.

After: the celebration is muted. The cart drivers gravely take their places, a single trumpet plays, and David dances alone. Why? And where have Uzzah and Ahio gone?

What happens in the gap is this: as the oxen pull the cart forward, it jolts, and the ark tips or slides. Uzzah reaches out and “takes hold of the ark” to steady it—and God strikes him dead because of that single gesture, meant to protect the ark from harm. In response, David is “afraid of the Lord” and asks, “How can the ark of the Lord come into *my* care?”

If you read what’s in the gap, the subdued tone of the second procession of the ark begins to make sense.

The omission of Uzzah’s death and David’s response might make the story more comfortable for worship use. But it effectively creates an official version of the story. There haven’t been any dead here, the official version declares. Nothing has happened in Macondo.

What is lost when we skip over the difficult passages? In this case, a great deal. Omitting Uzzah’s death and David’s response flattens and distorts the text: it can be read as a fairly straightforward story about David’s faithfulness and leadership. He is simply moving the ark into Jerusalem in order to place God at the center of the life of Israel. (Though Michal’s disdain for David’s dancing is another wrinkle worth careful attention.)

It’s possible David’s motivations are indeed rooted in faith. It may also be that David has his own interests in mind. Bringing the ark into his newly established capital might serve to boost the city’s reputation and consolidate his political power. The missing verses hint at David’s mixed motives.

When David expresses fear after Uzzah’s death, we see him in a moment of humility and self-reflection, perhaps considering the danger of claiming the presence of holiness for one’s own purposes, perhaps lamenting that the cost was a human life. It is a moment of grief and moral struggle.

But the moment passes. After hearing that the ark’s presence was a blessing to the household where he left it after Uzzah died, David decides he would like to have it in his city after all. He seems to give not another thought to Uzzah, not another moment to consider the weight of responsibility that comes with the power God has

given him.

I've always appreciated the discipline of preaching from the lectionary—taking the assigned texts and listening to them to hear God's word for this present moment. If verses are omitted from a passage, I certainly read them in preparation, and I might mention them in preaching, but often I have just gone along with the text as the lectionary presents it.

This one feels different. Omitting Uzzah's death and David's response changes the story. It also echoes a pattern we have seen too often: the erasure or justification of a death because the killer holds a position of authority and trust. George Floyd's killer was convicted of murder, but if Darnella Frazier had not borne the pain of witnessing Floyd's death and filming it, there would have been a hole in the story. And many of us would have taken the story as it was given to us.

People of color and immigrants have long borne the pain of witnessing unacknowledged violence, injustice, and trauma. Those of us with the choice to look or turn away are called to bear witness and to wrestle with the whole story. Because plenty has happened in Macondo, if you read the whole story.