Where are you from? In the military we hail from a wide variety of places but all of us have a home. It may be the last place we lived or a favorite place if we’ve lived in many places over the years, but all of us have home. Where are you from? (Ask individual Plebes this question.) All of those are awesome places. And believe it or not, over time you’ll learn to love this place. Annapolis, and the United States Naval Academy, will become very special to you once you get on the other side of Plebe Summer! I promise!

Well I wonder, have you ever wondered what would happen if God visited your hometown in some dramatic way? How would the people of your hometown respond? Would they receive him or reject him? More to the point, would you receive him or reject him? It’s a good question. When I was your age, the Oakridge Boys recorded a song that asked that very question:

If they saw Him riding in, long hair flying in the wind,
Would they love Him down in Shreveport today?
If they heard He was a Jew and a Palestinian too,
Would they love Him down in Nashville today?

If they saw Him talk with ease to the junkies, whores, and thieves,
Would they love Him out in Wichita today?
Would the rich men think it funny if He said give up your money?
Would they love Him up on Wall Street today?

If He said love those who use you, and forgive those who abuse you,
If He turned the other cheek, what would you say?
Would you laugh and call Him crazy, and just send Him on his way,
If Jesus came to your town today?

What would you say if the Lord visited your town today? Would your town receive him or reject him? More importantly, would you receive him or reject him if he visited you today? Well my friend, he is visiting you today – right here and right now. He said, “I'll never leave thee nor forsake thee.” (Heb. 13:5 KJV) “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mt. 28:20 NRSV) And “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Mt. 18:20 KJV) He's here. What will you do with him?

Well in today’s Old Testament lesson, King David opens Jerusalem and welcomes God into his hometown – Jerusalem – the City of David. You see, in the Old Testament God’s presence was symbolized by the ark of the covenant. The ark of the covenant was a golden box that served as God’s earthly throne. Its cover was called the mercy seat. Two angels called cherubim spread their wings over it and God appeared above it
Whenever he wanted to speak to his people. Numbers 7:89 says, "When Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with the Lord, he would hear the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat...." (NRSV)

Yes, the ark of the covenant served as God’s throne and symbolized his earthly presence. At one point it fell into the hands of Israel’s enemies before coming finally to rest in the city of Baale-judah. Second Samuel 6 tells how David brought it up from Baale-judah to Jerusalem when he made Jerusalem, the City of David, his capitol city.

The first attempt to move the ark was unsuccessful. The ark was holy as God is holy, and God had given specific instructions on how to move it. David failed to follow God's guidance and a man lost his life as a consequence. (See 2 Samuel 6:1-7 and 1 Chronicles 13:1-10; 15:1-15) When that happened, David left the ark in the house of a man named Obed-edom. And God blessed Obed-edom and his entire household because of his reverent care for the ark of God. When David heard about this blessing, he decided to try again and so he gathered the people to bring the ark with joy and rejoicing into the city of Jerusalem.

As David brought the ark into the city of Jerusalem, he did two things that model how we should respond to God’s presence among us. First, he offered sacrifices and then he danced before the Lord.

First, David offered various sacrifices to celebrate God’s presence as symbolized by the ark. Second Samuel 6:12-13 says, “David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling.” (NRSV) And Second Samuel 6:17 says, “They brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being, or peace offerings, before the Lord." (NRSV)

You see, sacrifices are a common element in almost every religion. It seems there is an inherent human need to offer something to God whenever God draws near. Now there were many different sacrifices in the Jewish religious system. Some were offered to secure forgiveness. Others were offered to express gratitude. Still others were offered to secure God's favor. And some were offered as an expression of affection. But all were costly and all were given to God from loving hearts.

David’s first sacrifice was probably offered to secure God’s forgiveness and favor. Remember, in his first attempt to move the ark he disobeyed God’s guidance and a man lost his life as a consequence. Perhaps David wanted God’s forgiveness for his previous mistake and God’s blessing on this new endeavor.

The latter offerings were a burnt offering and a peace offering. The burnt offering symbolized David’s complete devotion to God. Just as the sacrificial animal was completely consumed in the fire and ascended heavenward in the flame, so also, David
offered himself completely, totally, and wholly to God without any reservation at all. He held nothing back. He surrendered himself completely to God and God’s will. And then he capped this all off by offering a peace offering to demonstrate that he was at peace with God.

Now we no longer offer animal sacrifices but we should offer spiritual sacrifices whenever God draws near. Like David we should seek God’s forgiveness. Have you done that? Have you asked God to forgive your sins and your wrongdoings? And like David we should ask for God’s favor. Have you done that? Have you asked him to bless you? I bet you have but this prayer shouldn’t come before the first. We shouldn’t ask for God’s blessing until we’ve asked first for his forgiveness. And then like David, we should surrender ourselves completely to God. Have you done that? We sometimes sing an old song that says it well. Each of us should say:

All to Jesus, I surrender;
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.

All to Jesus, I surrender;
Lord, I give myself to Thee;
Fill me with Thy love and power;
Let Thy blessing fall on me.

I surrender all, I surrender all,
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.

Have you said that? Have you meant that? Have you done that? Have you surrendered your life to God? If you do that then you are peace with God just as David was when he offered the peace offering at the end of the ceremony.

So you see, when God came to town, David offered sacrifices. And we should do the same. But instead of offering animals to God, we should offer ourselves to him without any reservation! In the words of Romans 12:1, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” (KJV)

Yes, when God came to town, David offered sacrifices. And then, David danced before the Lord. Second Samuel 6:14 says he danced before the Lord with all his might. Second Samuel 6:16 says he was leaping and dancing before the Lord. In fact, he made such a show of it that his wife Michal despised him in her heart but David didn’t care. He wasn’t dancing for Michal. He wasn’t dancing for the crowd. He was dancing for the Lord! You see, David was moved by the presence of God – moved to action. And we should be too!
Thirty years ago I graduated from a little Baptist college in southern Indiana. In those days, Baptists weren’t allowed to dance. This may not have been true for all Baptists, it may not be true for most Baptists, but for those Baptists, dancing was strictly taboo. Everyone knew that dancing would lead to trouble as sure as shooting; and if my high school experience is any evidence then there may have been a bit of wisdom to that old Baptist prohibition. Nevertheless, we found a way around the rule. We didn’t go to dances, we went to record socials! Yes, records were playing and we were moving but we weren’t dancing. We were socializing!

Now I suppose some dancing is dangerous. I should know; I did a bit of it my own day. But some dancing is holy and ought to be done. And when God drew near David, and David drew near God, David had to dance! He was moved by God’s presence. My friend, we may not dance but we should be moved by God’s presence among us – moved to action by God’s action in our midst.

Your very presence here this morning is a sign you’ve been moved by God. You didn’t have to come. You could have stayed at home or in the rack. But you came. Why? Maybe you came because you’re curious. Maybe you came because your friends come. Maybe you came because you like the music. Maybe you came because your son or your daughter is a Plebe and you hope to get a glimpse of them as they march by. But maybe, just maybe, you came because you have encountered the living God and been moved by the experience. I pray that’s the case. But whatever the case may be, God moved you to be here. And I pray you are moved by God just as David was – moved to worship God as David did; moved to work for God as David did; moved to dance for God as David did with happy abandon and joyful exuberance; moved to serve your neighbor as David was when he gave food to the crowd before sending them away. For pity the poor heart that’s too cold or too calloused to be moved when God draws near!

So how does this old story apply to you and me in this present hour? Well first, you need to know that God is here right now, even in our midst. Jesus said, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mt. 28:20 NRSV) And in Matthew 18:20 he said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (KJV) And in Hebrews 13:5 the Lord says, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” (KJV)

He’s here. What will you do with him? Will you lay your life on the altar as an offering to him? And will you let yourself be moved; moved to worship him; moved to serve him; moved to adore him; and moved to dance the dance of faith before a scoffing world? The choice is yours. What will you choose? What will you do when God comes to your town today?