

# God's Home

12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost 2009

Epistle: Ephesians 6:10-20

Gospel: John 6:56-69

Lesson: 1 Kings 8:(1, 6, 10-11) 22-30, 41-43, Text Courtesy Vanderbilt Divinity Library

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8:1 Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion.

8:6 Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim.

8:10 And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD,

8:11 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

8:22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven.

8:23 He said, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart,

8:24 the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand.

8:25 Therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, 'There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.'

8:26 Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David.

8:27 "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!

8:28 Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today;

8:29 that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place.

8:30 Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive.

8:41 "Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name

8:42 --for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm--when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house,

8:43 then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.

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The Ark of the Covenant, the housing for the holy tablets of the Ten

Commandments, (which had at one point also housed the golden pot of Manna and

Aaron's rod) had long been wandering around with the nomadic Israelites, and had

been waiting in the City of David, has at this scripture finally found a home. The

greatest wish for Abraham and his followers has come to pass, they have a solid foundation, stability and proof that Yahweh is the greatest God in the world! This is the highest point of Solomon's empire - perhaps the pinnacle of the Israeli rule.

And not just a house! A Temple!! And Solomon, who was very serious about the importance of this dwelling place, spared no expense in building it. Expensive cedar wood paneled the rooms of the temple and the floor was of cypress. Bronze adorned the altar, platforms, statues and ornaments. There were gold doors and walls. Workmen were brought from all of Israel! The King of Tyre was contracted to supply workers. In Kings 5 we read that Solomon "had seventy thousand who carried burdens, and eighty thousand who quarried stone in the mountains." Those who quarried were overseen by 3,300 of Solomon's deputies.

And after much expense (Solomon had to even give away territory to pay some of his debts), came the big day to bring the Ark of the Covenant to its new home. Great care was taken in the handling of the Ark as it was being placed in its new housing. When David brought in the Ark to Jerusalem it slipped at one point and the man who touched it in order to set it straight, died! So the Ark was lovingly placed in its holy place underneath the wings of the cherubim and the priests there couldn't do anything for a while, because God, in a cloud, filled the place. It seems

he was making himself at home - he could finally relax and fill the space that was to be his, or maybe he was mad at being caged in(?).

And Solomon begins his prayers and supplications. This was his crowning achievement. All that he had promised God and his Father would be done on this day. And we see Solomon before the Altar of the Lord praying and offering sacrifice.

And he prayed well! He acknowledged that there is no God like Yahweh who has kept such a constant caring relationship with his people over the generations. He gave credit to his Father and the promise God made with him, Solomon didn't try to keep all the glory for himself. And he prayed for this relationship to continue with further generations.

He recognized that God cannot dwell only here - that even heaven cannot contain God, much less this earthly place. He prayed for God to keep constant watch on this place. And he prayed for foreigners' prayers to be heard! He prayed that God would grant the prayers even of the Gentiles. Very ecumenical and mission minded was Solomon!

Yes, it seems a good time was had by all, but then again, maybe not. Let's look a little more closely at this.

We have this Ark of the Covenant, which was always able to roam free with its people, as was its original wish, housed inside a building with courtyards and walls and barriers around it. It is surrounded not by the moon and the stars, the shepherds and the sheep, the people and the nature, but adorned with opulence of Bronze and Gold and statues and prohibitive in who may come near it. Although it was still able to be moved, it became permanently a part of this fixture - and was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 587 BC when he destroyed the city and the temple. It was roaming for over 300 years and somehow the people around it seemed to forget 400 years later that it could still be moved. The people seemed to have gotten settled into the understanding that God could only be worshiped here in this place.

And no wonder - when Solomon built this temple, he replaced Mt. Sinai with the Temple Mount. It was a tremendous shift in world view for the Israelites. They were no longer nomads; their God had taken up residence. And they no longer needed only judges and priests as before, either! Solomon offered up the prayers and the offerings. Later he would have others do this on a regular basis - but he sets himself up here as the head of the Priests. And what else do we find? We find, in this opulent place - that Solomon has set up religion as a commodity. It

cost a lot to build this, and in order to keep it going, they had to make some money in this endeavor, too - so offerings to God became a business.

And how about the actual building of the Temple? We find that he used forced labor to build God's House - he had slaves do his hard labor - even fellow Israelites. Moses frees God's people from slavery and finds God, puts the covenant in an Ark to roam free with the people, and Solomon takes the Ark and puts humanity into slavery in order to keep it in one place.

So where is God's Home really? Was it in the Temple? Is it in Jerusalem? Is it in the opulence of financial security? Is it here in this sanctuary? Interestingly enough, *Jesus* makes a reference to Solomon we find it in Matthew 6:

**"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."**

We have, for the last 3 weeks, had Gospel lessons which make reference to Christ's Body and Blood being the new covenant and those who partake of him have eternal life. Christ speaks to us of the Holy Spirit - which has no dwelling place - and followers of Christ having no place to rest their heads - because the tendency to become complacent is great in comfort.

We need to be aware of our complacent tendencies, for it is then that our faith can be destroyed, as was the Ark in Jerusalem. Paul warns us today to put on the full armor of God to fight against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places! *Evil in Heavenly places?* Solomon, whether he was aware of it or not, used the Ark for his own glory. He made an earthly heavenly place for the Ark for evil purposes. He used God for his own personal and political gain. He was not compassionate about the humans who suffered for it.

*Evil in heavenly places* - we have in this country, for too long, ignored the suffering around us as though living separated from the impoverished in our own Temples was an OK thing to do.

Jesus spent his ministry caring for the impoverished and the needy, because he knew that God's home is in them. He lived his compassion for the poor, practiced love, forgiveness, and sacrifice. He preached that we are not to be anxious for material things but to seek those things that strengthen the fabric of the community.

We who call ourselves Christian need to be aware of where our holy spaces are. Are they in the things we own or in the deeds we do for the least of these? Let us not forget that the Ark of Covenant which dwells in our hearts can be moved! We *can* refocus God's home in our lives. We need to care for those who are suffering and not shut out their cries for justice. We need to be with them and fight for them when they are unable. We need to be walking and dwelling with those in need, not locked up in an opulent temple out of fear and for our own power. May we be living Arks of

**God's covenant every day, empowered by Jesus Christ, who shares his temple with us every Sunday in communion.**