

# Edifice or Edify?

Readings for the day:

Psalm 89: 20-37 / Epistle, Ephesians 2:11-22 / Gospel Mark 6:30-34 & 53-56

Sermon text, 2 Samuel 7:1-14a (text courtesy Vanderbilt Divinity Library)

7:1 Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him,  
7:2 the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent."  
7:3 Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."  
7:4 But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan:  
7:5 Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in?  
7:6 I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle.  
7:7 Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"  
7:8 Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel;  
7:9 and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.  
7:10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly,  
7:11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house.  
7:12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.  
7:13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.  
7:14a I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.

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We have before us the section where Nathan, following God's will, talks David out of building a Temple for the Ark of the Covenant, saying that instead, God wants him to establish an everlasting dynasty, and let his son build the house. In a Mel Brooks comedy God would be the Jewish mother from the Bronx saying, "Look, you're tired after all that warring and nation building stuff. I've been wandering around for years without a house, and I have complained, No! You have enough to do, so don't worry about me, I'll still be around when your son becomes King and he can do it for me. I'll be fine! We'll get along great."

It just seemed that for that time and history, what God felt David needed to do was maintain the nation after working so hard to build it up strong. The best and most ideal goals that a country which lives in security and strength should offer are alternatives to war and designs for justice and peace, and David will have his hands full maintaining this new strong nation. Now seems the time when God is saying to David, you've done enough. Now you don't need to start something new, wait for your soul to catch up with you.

I have told this story so many times outside the pulpit, and wouldn't be surprised if you *all* have heard it before, but this sermon illustration seems to define David's situation the best, and I have been told that it was true.

It seems there was a group of British explorers who had hired a large group of African males from one village to carry their supplies. They travelled day and night for many days, when one day the Brits came and found the villagers sitting and resting and not ready to travel. When asked why they were not getting ready to move on, they responded, "We have been traveling many, many days, and are far away from our village and our families. We have to wait here for our souls to catch up with us."

I think God was telling David at this point, you've come a long way, not so long ago you were but a shepherd boy. You've been through a lot in that time, rest and find your true self. You don't need another new task. And as one reads on in the chapter it seemed that David was busy enough with maintaining and building his nation through war - which is something he knew, not a new field of study like city planning.

No, the great Temple for God was to be built by David's son Solomon, and David was busy in his life creating barriers by force for the other nations to be separated physically. His goal was to make Israel a great nation - a great race, in power and worldly respect.

We see a different view of greatness in our Gospel, where Jesus is followed and worshiped and wherever he walked he was recognized as a healer. He observed the law, was a good Jew, but this man, this son of God, this God incarnate's priority wasn't nation building but healing the body and the soul. And Paul refers to the fact that circumcised or not, Jesus has broken down the walls - the barriers that David spent so much effort to built up. Jesus, who he himself had been an observant Jew, had abolished the laws based on exclusivism, "that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of two, thus making peace."

It seems the new covenant between God and his people is no longer dependent on having a powerful political leadership, but one of creating peace, one where the needs of those who are suffering are of greater priority than building a nation or a temple.

When I first started struggling with this scripture, I used a little tool that I love, that is called 'The Dictionary'. I wrote the word temple on a piece of paper, and then made notes from the dictionary about what it means. Then underlined certain words that I found important and vital to the definition, and looked those up as well, taking notes the entire time. It is a lovely spiritual exercise and I recommend it for all. For in the beginning was the Word, and it was good.

I found myself defining 'Temple', and just for fun, I'm going to share a bit of my journey with you. One definition was, 'a space marked out by an augur for taking observations'. An augur? What on earth is an augur? Well, let me tell you - it is an Official who interpreted omens from birds and other such stuff - but what is also interesting is that it is part of the word inaugurate - meaning to begin with good omens.

A Temple is also a consecrated space - set apart as sacred to the deity, a sanctuary - a holy place. And Nathan is telling David that God doesn't really care about it. It seems that God is saying, no place is sacred, and yet everyplace is sacred. Every place that God, who created all, is or has been is sacred. And what is more - God doesn't need an *Edifice* - a large and stately building - to be powerful. God needs for his creations to *Edify* each other - to build up in faith and in holiness.

So we begin to see the difference in our own lives when we think about where our time and energies are going. Are we focused on building an *Edifice* where we can protect ourselves from others and build up our power? And if so, what would they be? Are we focusing on edifying ourselves and others through caring and healing and breaking down borders? And if so, how are we doing that?

What sort of power do we see our Edifice, our church here, as having? How do we think strangers to our church see our Temple?

As inheritors of the unconditional promise that God gave David, are we edifying each other and those we come in contact with? Are we edifying our Edifice? (A few weeks ago it was a jungle in here, next week it will be a pirate ship!) In other words, are we building up this instrument of God - this church - so that it's acting as Jesus taught us?

These are questions that plague me as I begin my ministry here, getting to know you all and all that this church does. I grow impatient wanting to know all that this congregation and building are capable of. My head spins with the potential and the awe that I feel for what is being done in God's name here.

But for now, I feel called to unpack and furnish my temple over there, to think, look, plan, and wait for my soul to catch up with me. And I also feel the need to thank you once again for edifying me and my family.

The mystery of how we will progress together in this temple is known only to God. But what we do know, we learned from the Epistle - that we are no longer strangers and aliens, but are "citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God" we are "joined together to grow into a Holy Temple in the Lord; in whom we are also built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God."