

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Jeanene Mutchler
Sunday, October 20, 2024

The Holy One of Israel, the one who dwelt in a tent, the one who traveled in an ark containing stone tablets etched with the Ten Commandments, is here with us today. God, open our hearts and minds to hear again the words of faith spoken by God's people since the days of the kings of old. Amen.

2 Samuel 7:1-17

7 Now when the king was settled in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 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." 3 Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind, for the Lord is with you."

4 But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, 5 "Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? 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 Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders[a] of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' 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, 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. 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, 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. 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. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. 15 But I will not take[b] my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me;[c] your throne shall be established forever." 17 In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

The week before last was fall break for some families. More than 100 Idlewilders were away at all Church camp in Middle Tennessee. I hear it was a beautiful and fulfilling time. My family missed NaCoMe this year because we had a family vacation planned. It was one we had been planning for about 6 months. Liam, our son who just helped Edwin and Pastor Mary commission the Ghana Partnership trip, learned about Machu Picchu in third grade social studies class. After Liam gave presentations to the family ,stories, and asking Alexa random facts about Machu

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Picchu, he convinced his sister and the rest of us that this was where we needed to take our family's trip this year. Will, my husband, is a pilot for American Airlines, so if there is open space we can hop on a flight standby. So two weeks ago, we got to go to Peru. There was so much we loved about the trip. The food, the ruins, the cobblestone mountain villages, our time together- But Machu Picchu- the iconic and impressive architectural wonder- was honestly, not our favorite part. We spent so much time researching it. We imagined what it would be like and when we finally got there...it was just.. Different from what we had in our minds. It was wonderful and we are grateful we got to go. But that picturesque site, the one you just have to post on instagram, just was not the most beloved part of our journey. The reality was so different from what we had imagined.

That's a common pattern in our lives, isn't it? Reality can be different from the things we have in our minds and imaginations. We imagine what our jobs, our partners, our families, our churches, our homes, might look like. More often than not, reality is different from what we imagined. Real life often looks so unlike what we've created in our minds.

TS: This is a pattern true for us, and it's a pattern we see in scripture.

Reality is different from the things we have in our minds and imaginations.

I'll take that a step further and say, The reality that God is building, is often different from what we hold onto in our minds. And we know this about ourselves. It's why we pray a prayer of illumination before hearing the word read and proclaimed this week. A few moments ago Eze prayed, "God, open our hearts and minds to hear again the words of faith". We need God's help to be open to what God is up to.

King David needed God's help to do just that in today's scripture lesson. 2 Samuel 7:1-17

The broad narrative of 1 and 2 Samuel was initially written as one scroll or book, but due to length it was broken into 2. So after Israel was rescued from slavery in Egypt, they made a covenant with God at Mt Sinai. God would be their God and they would be God's people. After some wandering and stumbling in the desert, they finally came into the promised land. There Israel intended to be faithful to God and keep the promises they made at Mt Sinai. But... they couldn't. The Israelites enter a time when they are ruled by Judges. It was a time of moral chaos as Israel drifted further and further away from being the people that God called them to be. Enter the Samuel narrative- the story that unfolds is meant to provide an answer to the problem Israel finds herself in.

We will see three main characters in the Samuel narrative- Samuel, the prophet, King Saul and then King David. They transitioned Israel from being a group of tribes led by judges to becoming a unified kingdom led by Kings with Jerusalem serving as their central city. This story unfolds in 4 parts. Part 1, we hear the story of Samuel's birth. Pastor Joshua introduced us to Samuel's mother Hannah last Sunday. Part 2 - we hear about the rise of King Saul very quickly followed by the downfall and tragic death of Saul. Part 3-We hear about the rise of King

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David and then.. Spoiler alert, later in the story, we'll hear about David's personal failure. He makes mistakes which results in his family falling into disarray and then the very kingdoms he was part of bringing together, will begin to fracture. Part 4- The story is wrapped up by a conclusion, an epilogue that looks back to the very promise God made to David in today's scripture.

I will build you a house, God says. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.”

Let's zoom back in on the David we see in chapter 7. Here, we find David in Part 3a of the Story-The rise of King David.

Verse 7 says, Now David was settled in his house- David fought battles and was victorious. He has been crowned King of Israel and made Jerusalem his political capital. He built his palace, his “house of cedar” there. In moving to Jerusalem, he also moved the physical representation of God there too. The ark of the covenant was inlaid with gold and elaborately carved and was so holy no one could touch it directly and only priests could draw near. They built a tent, the tabernacle around it. This was their physical representation of God amongst them. When the Israelites were wandering, God's presence went with them. And now they had a capital city and David wanted to establish a religious capital as well.

David has rest from all his battles, he lives in a royal home and now he wants to build a permanent dwelling for God. He wants to move the ark, the physical representation of the presence of God, into a temple. He wants to build God a house.

And what does God think about that....

I'll summarize God's words here, v 4 David you want to build me a house?

are you really the guy to do that for me?

you see, I have been living in a tent for awhile now and it has been just fine

I have not asked anyone to build me a fancy house

David, you want to do this great thing for me. But, I, God, am the one who has done great things for you and I will continue to do even more than you can imagine.

If this text was translated into the southern vernacular, it might read, David you want to build me a house, bless your heart.

David thought he, through his own effort, could do this thing for God. Bless it.

How often do we think we have gotten to where we are in life through our own efforts?

I am constantly amazed by this congregation. So many of you have jobs and families that contribute to the well being of our city. You are doctors, teachers, non profit leaders, business people, parents, and friends who make Memphis better. You are givers- you give your time and your resources to better the lives of others. Just yesterday, this place was full of lawyers and

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volunteers who gave out free legal advice to those with need at our annual Midtown legal Clinic..

You do a lot to work towards bringing the Peace in our city And yet - as much as we do... it is not through our own efforts alone. It is God's good work. If we are willing, If we are attuned to the Spirit we get to jump in and join what God is already up to in our world. God is building something.

A lot of times we put so much pressure on ourselves. I have to work this hard, I have to hustle and push and achieve, and God says to us, wait YOU don't have to do that.. God says, I am building something. You want to build me a house? I am building you a house.

It is through God's initiative that we are made whole. We forget that as the writer Wendell Berry penned, Grace- not works is the currency in God's divine economy. We do good works as a result of God's overflowing abundance in our hearts and in our lives. The works are a sign of God's activity in and through us. Good works are not what we have to do to earn love. To earn value. You are enough. You are loved just because you are God's child. No other reason. It is God who takes the initiative to make us whole and to make our world whole. It is not something that can be earned. And that is such Good News, because as we confess at the beginning of every service, there will be times we miss the mark.

King David certainly fell short. And oh how David fell. David took the wife of one of his soldiers. And to cover up what he did, he had his soldier assassinated. David's household was a mess- his sons would insite insurrections - At times it looked like David might lose his kingdom due to division. Thank goodness it wasn't up to King David to earn God's love.

God takes the initiative for us. God does the work and we get to join in. God is with us when we are at our worst and God is with us when we are at our best.

God has been with you all along. God was with David all along.

Verse 8b, Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel;

David was not always a King... Once upon a time he was a youngest son shepherd boy. He was out in the wilderness following some sheep when God made him the unexpected leader of a newly formed nation. From pasture to a prince.

Verse 9 and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you;

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God was with David when he was a shepherd and God was with David when he stood before Goliath, God was with David when he was spared from King Saul's wrath, God was with David when he fought the Philistines and the Moabites, and on we could go detailing how God was with David wherever he went.

If you wrote a litany for yourself, what would it look like? God was with you when you got into that school, God was with you in your relationship when it didn't look like it was gonna make it, God was with you when that car accident was a near miss. God was with you in your mourning. God was with you in your celebrating. How has God been with you wherever you have gone?

David wants to build God a House, but *God* will build David a house.

There is this play on words that comes out in the Hebrew of this text. We see the word house or, "bai et" in Hebrew, repeated multiple times, but it has three different meanings in the passage. The first time it means a palace for David. The second time it means a temple. And then God says the word house, or Bai et, - when God says it.. God means a dynasty.

Verse 11, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me
V16 16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me;[c] your throne shall be established forever.

A throne that will last forever. Biblical scholars tell us that this promise of a dynasty that will be made sure, that will last forever, is one of the most important promises God makes in the Hebrew scriptures. Why? Because it's a messianic promise. The Psalms will point back to this promise, the prophets will point back to this promise and when we get to the New Testament this promise is referenced when writers celebrate that God's promises have been fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Jesus sits upon the throne that is established forever. God is up to something.

David just wanted to build God a house. But God is Building David a house.

David had the idea of a temple, a physical place of worship, in his mind. But God had a plan so much bigger than that. God wasn't going to let David build God a place of worship. Instead, God will make David's family into a dynasty that will lead to the incarnation of God in flesh- Jesus the Christ.

I imagine David might have been a rather confident, maybe at times even arrogant person... but I doubt even he could have imagined that God would do this kind of thing through him. David you want to build me a house? Just we wait and see what God is up to...

In the New Testament, Paul the apostle writes in Ephesians 3:20-21 in the Contemporary English Version it reads,

20-21 I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. His power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine.

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God can do more than we could ever ask or imagine. The reality that God is building is often different than what we hold onto in our minds. King David dreamed of building God a temple.... What do you dream of building for God? What is your heart's desire? To start that company? To raise a family well? To be more vulnerable? To find a partner? To get that promotion? To be more involved at church? What is the dream you have for your life that you think will bring wholeness to yourself and to our world?

What if God wants even more than that for you? What if your dream is too small? God's power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. What if what God is building for you is far beyond what you've envisioned. What if it's not something that you have to earn, or hustle, or push. God is taking the initiative for you and you get to be open, and listen, and join in helping with the kind of house God is building. It is often different from what we've imagined and it might take some time...

God promised David that his throne would last forever. But David's household would have turmoil and in just two generations David's Grandson, King Rehoboam, would see their united kingdom broken into two. Later the Assyrian empire and then the Babylonian Empire would conquer Israel. The throne that would last "forever" often looked like it was lost. But through darkness and hard times God kept God's promises. Scholars tell us there were about 1000 years between King David and the birth of Jesus. Even when God's people couldn't see it, God was at work.

God is at work for you too. God is up to something. It might be taking some time. It might look different from what you imagined. But if we have eyes and ears open to it, we can join in the dream that God has for us.