

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, October 27, 2024

Gracious and loving Spirit, fall fresh upon us this morning. Fall fresh and quiet us that we might hear what it is you have to speak to us this day. And we pray that by the inspiration of your spirit that which we hear will help transform the way that we live. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

If you weren't here in this service last week, we really encourage you to go back and watch it. Our children led us in our first Children's Sunday. They designed the Bulletin. They wrote the Liturgy. Jeanene preached. It was a wonderful time. If you were here, then you know how beautiful it was; if you weren't, go back and watch that service online. We were in 2 Samuel last week, and there was a discourse about the Temple and David, and we've moved ahead this week in the Narrative Lectionary to First Kings, chapter 8, where we'll kind of pick up at the...on another part of that journey of this Temple story. We're in verse...we're in chapter 8 of First Kings. We're going to read 22 to 24 and then 27 to 30.

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands to heaven. 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 with your servants who walk before you with all their heart, 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.

"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! 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, 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. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; hear and forgive."

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

So just a little recap for those who weren't here with us last week. God and David have this interaction in 2 Samuel where it is revealed that David will not be the one that constructs the temple of God, but his heir will; and so it comes to pass that Solomon undertakes this major construction project, this great work of building the Temple of God for the people of Israel and for all the world. And then we get to skipping all the construction. We get to come into the story when everything has been completed, and the punch list is done. And we get to see this really significant moment in the life of God's people. It's a moment of deep gratitude, and we cannot miss that, because this is a moment that has been years and years in the making. It's a moment of deep gratitude, because this moment signifies to God's people that God keeps God's promises, God's covenant with them. There was a promise that a temple would be built, and it has come to fruition. It's also a moment of gratitude to the community because building the Temple took the efforts of the entire community. If this was a group project, there was not one person who got to lag behind and still got the good grade, right. Everyone was invested in building the Temple of

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God. Everyone's efforts built this Temple. Everyone's efforts led to this Holy Place. Nobody got to sit it out.

You would also know if you have, you would know of the importance of this moment, if you have ever undertaken a construction project of your own, if you have ever spent time renovating a kitchen or drawing up plans to build a house or making a puzzle with your family on vacation. Then you know that construction projects of scale bring out the best and the worst in people, and that's what we kind of skip over by moving from 2 Samuel into First Kings. We skip over, I don't know, the fun part, okay? We didn't get to be there. We didn't get to read when the plans were drawn up. I'm sure no one had opinions about the plans, right? We didn't get to be there when the plan started taking physical shape. I'm sure no one got tired of showing up on the job site, no one came hangry, right? We didn't get to see the people who were paying attention to all the little ins and outs of the community gathering together, so we didn't get to meet the person who realized that donuts would make everything better early in the morning so they brought donuts, right, or how there's kind of this 2 in the afternoon lull in the work and so they needed to sing during that time. But what we can be assured of is with any construction project any time that we have spent so extensively building something, there will be all sorts of complications. This community has gotten to know each other even better than they wanted to. They have seen the best in each other and probably the worst as well, but they have borne the labor together; and they've come to this moment when everything has been completed, the punch list is done, and the dwelling place of God which was the Ark of the Covenant. Just before the text that we read this morning, it has just made its way from where it has been held into the Holy of Holies. And once that has happened, Solomon begins to pray, and then he steps back in front of all the people, and he lifts his hands, and he begins to speak aloud the scripture that we read this morning. What Solomon knows is that the people have built the Temple, but he also knows that the Temple in some ways has built the people. It has shaped them, this construction project has shaped them in ways that they know and they don't know. He knows that God has been at work in their building. Solomon knows what we ultimately know when we dedicate ourselves to the task of building together, it changes us. When we dedicate ourselves to creating, in this instance, holy spaces, something happens amongst God's people. Something is drawn out—community and gratitude. I started thinking this week upon imagining Solomon stepping back and raising his hands and thanking God for God keeping God's covenant and praying over the community, I started thinking about how important those moments of dedication become for us. It would not have been the same experience had the punch list been completed and then people just started moving furniture into the Temple. Something needs to happen. We need to mark the time. We're kind of doing that this morning with Commitment Sunday as well. To be able to say what we have built and are building is significant to God and God's people. Solomon also in that prayer dedicates this holy space to God. I think that's important for us. He uses words to say, “This is your holy space, God. This place of stone that we have spent years building together—it is yours and you dwell here.” But scripture is very clear that Solomon doesn't simply believe that God only dwells in the Temple. “Even Heaven and the highest Heaven cannot hold you, God. Will you dwell amongst us?” Solomon knows that the temple is simply the place where people will gather, but that God will not solely be found in the temple but, indeed, in all places. What Solomon wants the people

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to hear in his dedication is that the place is incredibly important, but the people that they are and the ways in which they encounter God in their daily lives is ever more important; and it made me wonder, it made me wonder what holy spaces we have dedicated in our lives. It made me wonder if we dedicate holy spaces in our lives. I wonder what holy space you've dedicated on your calendar to being in community with other people following the way, to being in communion with God. I wonder what holy spaces you have dedicated in your calendar. I wonder what holy spaces you have dedicated in your budgets. I wonder what holy spaces you have dedicated in your service.

There is something greater happening here than the dedication of a temple. There is this wise leader saying that it is possible for us to create holy spaces in the world and in our lives, but I wonder for you this morning what does that look like? What does holy space look like in your day to day? I'm glad that at least for those who have gathered and those who are joining us virtually this morning, there is something holy about this space. It's not nothing that y'all make time to be here, right. That's not to be taken for granted, but it is to also say that God does not simply dwell here. So what are the holy spaces that you are creating in your life outside of this place? What holy space are you setting apart for God? Perhaps it's a space that you set aside a long time ago for study or for service, but because life gets crazy and busy, you don't have that space anymore. There's not time in the calendar to go serve a meal to those who are unhoused. There's not time in the calendar to go and work in the clothes closet. It's really difficult for you to show up at committee meetings, because your schedule is so crazy. Or the family budget's gotten tighter and tighter and tighter, and so what used to be holy and set aside for God can't be anymore, right? But maybe there's also, maybe there's also some bandwidth in places that you haven't thought of. Maybe, maybe there are some spaces that you could make holy by the grace of God. And I wonder if Solomon stepping back and raising his hands before the Temple is really an invitation to us. What space is God calling you to make holy in your life? What space is necessary for you to experience the depth and breadth and height and length of the very love of God? The promise that was celebrated at the dedication of the Temple is a promise that is still true today, that God promises to be present amongst us, working through us, achieving beautiful, powerful things. The question is how much time are we devoting to constructing those holy spaces in our lives.

My hope for you, my hope for myself, is that we might hear the dedication of the Temple as an invitation to create those holy spaces anew in our lives, and that we might be assured that God will show up there, that God will hear the prayers that are prayed there, and that God will continue to lead us and guide us in our communal life together and our relationships with our divine.

Let's join together in prayer.

Much labor went into your Temple, much labor from a community to make it a place that was indeed holy. We come before you this morning with the energy to labor as well, but we need direction. We need instruction. We need inspiration. So reveal to us, Mighty God, those places in our calendars and our budgets, in our lives that need to be set apart as holy spaces for you. Give

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us the courage and the discernment and the insight to create them, and then by the power of your spirit, make them holy. Let them shape us. Let them change us. For we ask it in the name of the one who dwells among us, Jesus the Christ. Amen.