

Wesley United Methodist Church

July 19, 2015

"Finding the Right House for God."

2 Samuel 7:1-17

Have you ever noticed how some families move a lot? Some are corporate moves, some are military, and some are United Methodist pastors. Whatever the case, every time they move they have to find lodging. In the military, quarters are often provided. The same may be true for clergy if churches own a parsonage. But, sometimes you have to look for a new home, which means spending time with real estate agents traveling here and there to find the perfect house. Of course, no house is ever perfect. When you own a home, no matter where you sit you see something that needs fixing. But when you're looking, you hope to find something that's just right with a minimum of fix-up. Every family searching for a new home has its own requirements--so many bedrooms, bathrooms, and a certain style garage. Finding the right house means there will be no rest for the weary. Some decide to give up looking and build the perfect dream house, and if that doesn't cause you to lose your religion, nothing else will!!

One day, David got the bright idea that God needed a house, and David even volunteered to help. Never mind that God hadn't needed a house so far--that is, for eternity. God had gotten along just fine without one. But, when a king like David gets something in his head, there's no stopping him. Yet, unlike other leaders who simply announce something and expect it to be done with the snap of a finger, David decided it might be a good idea to consult his chief religious counselor, the prophet Nathan. So, Nathan comes to listen to what his king has on his mind.

The room gets very quiet and David makes his announcement, "Here I am living in the lap of luxury in this house of cedar and God is housed in nothing but curtains. It's just not right." The hidden and understood message was, "I want to build a house for the Lord." Who is Nathan to question something like that? After all, David gets it. He understands that God is more important than he is, right? David doesn't want his God to be slumming it down in the ghetto while he's living it up in the high-rent district.

What a nice idea, Nathan must have thought. Now here's a king who has his priorities straight. What a great boss I have! David knows that he is a servant of God. David's instincts are right. We shouldn't live uptown in nice digs while God is nearly homeless. It all makes sense. No wonder Nathan said: "Sounds like a great plan!" He said it in part because he knew that God had always been with David and "assumed" that meant that God was giving all sorts of good ideas. Later in the story, when David comes on to Bathsheba, Nathan will realize that some of David's bright ideas came from his own sinfulness and had nothing to do with the Lord.

So, how was Nathan to know that David had anything self-proclaiming in mind? Of course, Nathan blurted his affirmative response out before consulting with God. Big mistake. What was he thinking? It's not the first time clergy-types have given elected officials bad advice, and I'm sure it won't be the last. David must have been excited to hear his chief counselor agree with him. As Nathan went off to pray just to make sure the Lord agreed with him, David went to bed thinking which architects and builders were going to get the contract. You've got to admit David seems to be trying to do the right thing. He wants to do something good for God.

Well, imagine Nathan's surprise when he knelt down to pray at night. "It's me again, Lord, Nathan, your humble servant checking in. The most amazing thing happened today. David your beloved one, wants to build a house for you! How about that? And Yahweh replies, "You think you're telling me something I don't already know? I know your every thought and his. And guess what? Both of you are wrong about this. I don't want a house. I don't need one. When are you guys going to learn that I'm in charge around here? If a house is going to be build for me, I'm the one who's going to suggest it, not you, and certainly not David. Who does he think he is anyway? You go back and tell him to put his building tools away and keep doing his job. I'll build a house when I'm good and ready, and he won't be the one who's helping build it anyway. You tell him that!"

Scripture doesn't tell us whether or not Nathan was shaking in his sandals by the end of this prayer but he could have been. God really set him and David straight. I wonder why? I think there are several reasons. First of all, David and Nathan are both thinking that God needs a house like human beings. In Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:48-50), he says, "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?'"

What they were doing is putting God in a box, which we're guilty of doing all the time. Let's reduce God to something we can know and control. That's why God offers this gentle rebuke, David's plan for a house is seen as a threat to God's freedom and an effort to control God's presence.

David's own self-interest pokes through in his desire to elevate his own status as king by building a temple for God. Something that will sanction his own reign as king. God sees right through David's ruse, and seems to be saying, "I don't need a temple now. I'm doing just fine without one. Temples are not for me; they're for human beings anyway. Besides, I'm more interested in obedience than sacrifice." What God is helping Nathan and David to understand is that the place of God is not as important as the presence of God. God's presence is a crucial thing.

There are many beautiful places we call cathedrals, temples, churches, sanctuaries for people to worship, however, if the presence of God is not there, we might as well use the buildings to sell antiques. When God's people gather to genuinely worship God, his presence is felt in every heart. God's essence is celestial, not confined to this building or any other one for that matter. And, once you build it, you have to maintain it. It seems that we don't have enough buckets to maintain this house. If you have ever been a trustee or are one right now, you know exactly what I am talking about. If God is dwelling in this house, it's raining on his head every time a thundercloud moves over.

God is not telling David that there will never be a place to worship. God is telling David that it's just not so important that he has to build it now. In fact, it will be David's son, Solomon, who will build it someday. In many ways, God's house is wherever the people of God are. Families that move around a lot know that "home" is wherever they are. God's house is wherever the poor are being fed, the downtrodden are lifted up, and wherever justice is being done.

There's more, and this is the surprising part of the story. God doesn't just turn down David's offer. God gives David an even greater one. "I will build a house for you." So often we go to God with an idea-- something that will be good for the community and perhaps even for us. It's a prayer, a wish. And without hesitation God says, "No." At first we are disappointed thinking that God must not love us. Then, if we listen carefully we will see that God has something even greater in mind. Martin Luther once noted, "We pray for silver when all along God wants to give us gold." That's what happens for David. God says, "I will make you a great name among the great ones of the earth. I will assign a place for my people Israel; there I will plant them and they shall dwell in their own land...I will give you peace from all your enemies. The Lord has told you that he would build up your royal house." There, that's it--the "royal house." This is the House of David that will be forever. Now, isn't that better than a little old temple, especially one that will get sacked during the Babylonian exile? David can't see that far ahead, but has enough sense that he's getting gold when all he asked for was silver.

One more thing I want to say. God is not just referring to Solomon who will build the temple. God is foreshadowing David's greater son, the one we call the Christ, the one who is of the house and lineage of David. He will be the fulfillment of God's promise to David.

So, you see, finding and building the right house for the Lord is not as easy as we might have thought. We're not the ones doing the building. God is the chief builder all along. But who is really surprised to hear that?