

“A Holy House”

As many of you may know from panicked Facebook posts on social media yesterday, Kai and I spent the day Saturday in the airport, waiting for one flight to New York from our vacation in Savannah, and when that was delayed... and then cancelled... waiting for another flight on a different airport, which was then delayed... and then cancelled. We spent the night in an airport motel, and (since I am here, we had good travel karma in order for me to slide right into the pulpit just in time to preach to you.

“Now the king had settled in his house, and The Lord had given him rest from his enemies all around him...” Our scripture from Second Samuel sets the stage for David to enjoy a bit of sabbath rest. He has escaped assassination attempts, brought the Ark into Jerusalem, established a name for the Hebrews-- no longer wanderers, but now a people with a king, and a palace. Can't they just enjoy their home, and enjoy their God, for some time?

But David cannot be settled. He tells the prophet Nathan, “See, now I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent!” Nathan, upon hearing David's concerns, prods him on, telling him, “Go ahead, do what you need to do!”

Since I just got back from vacation, I recognize the importance of finding just the right house to share with someone you love. My sister and I, as we were planning our week together at St. Simon's Island in Georgia, looked at dozens of options, mostly using the online booking sites AirB&B and VRBO. Looking at our options, we weighed the benefits of having a smaller place, but closer to the beach, or a bigger place, but further from the beach. Would it have a TV? Would there be enough bathrooms? Did it have anything fun for the kids to do so the adults could sleep in a little bit? And, of course, how much would it cost us? All these questions, to house an experience for sisters and their family, who haven't seen each other since before the pandemic began.

I wonder, if we were looking for a house for meeting up with God on VRBO or some other online booking, what would we want? I mean, we would probably want our church, right? That's why we provide for its regular maintenance, upgraded the kitchen, and have someone like our custodian, Jimmy, who tends to its cleaning and maintenance when Pete isn't tinkering on that himself.

But what if we wanted to make it extra special with God, what would we want? Would you want a room with quiet space, so that if God had something to say, maybe you could hear it? Would it have the vaulted ceilings, and light filtered through stained glass windows, inspiring awe? Would you want something *different* than what we love but take for granted in our own sanctuary, like emptiness, or a thick carpet with rugs facing east, so we could fall to our hands and knees and pray with our full bodies? What holy spaces have you entered that have stopped your breath because you knew you could sense holiness?

And then, we can wonder, who will be there? Will they be people who have figured this whole God thing out, wise teachers, preachers, or monastics, who can pass this sacred knowledge on to you? Or will it be people who have screwed up, and are just as in need of grace as you and I are?

We can imagine what we would look for, what we would need, in a space to encounter God-- a holy dwelling. But what would God need?

Well, as it turns out, God never told David, "I want a house, a Temple, where I can permanently dwell with my people." In fact, it seems that God preferred being on the move, hanging out in a tent, going wherever Israel wandered. And so, God told David, "Haven't I been with you all this time? From the pastures with the sheep to the battles that made you a hero, I've been with you-- but did I ever ask for a house of cedar? No. Instead, I will make a house for you, and when you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me."

Now, it eventually comes to pass that David's son Solomon actually fulfills David's announcement of a house for God, a grand structure whose dimensions had amazing proportions. So, perhaps recognizing that the people needed this Temple more than God did, that's where God hung out for a while.

But the thing about a Temple is that it can be destroyed. And it was. But it can be rebuilt. And it was. But it can be destroyed again. God wanted to be with the people in an even nearer way.

You know, this same scripture came up in our lectionary texts in Advent, in December-- and I used it to point to the birth of Christ-- that God would choose to take up residence in human flesh, and be with us. Jesus came to be the holy dwelling, a living Temple, for God.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul takes that idea a step even further. "Chris is the cornerstone," he tell us, but from him the whole structure grows so that in him we together are joined into a holy dwelling for God. That's just it: we need each other in order for this house to become a home.

And lest we look for those who feel familiar to us-- like the family that carries the same rituals and traditions and favorite vacation spots with the right amenities-- let's keep in mind that Paul wrote to ones who had been "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise;" in them and through them, Paul saw, and shared, that Christ had torn down the dividing walls, making one new humanity, making peace.

I don't know about you, but I need to find some of that peace. And I am wondering if we can trust one another just enough to sit in some silence together for a minute or so. Maybe we will feel a joyful sense of unity in that time. Maybe we will feel awkward and strange in our differences. Maybe we will miss the sounds and words and music that tends to fill the space. Let's just choose to be okay with that.

We don't have to provide a plump, sectional sofa for God to get cozy and take up residence here. God will find a home in us, and through us, even with our rough and unfinished edges. You *are* God's home. In silence, take a moment to consider what that means for you today.

(offers time for silent meditation)

Long ago, God offered David a chance for sabbath rest. Maybe that is where we begin to find our home in God, and let God find a home in us.