

## 2 Samuel 7:1-14a (New International Version)

After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."

Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you."

That night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying:

"Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"'

"Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies. 'The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son.

## **Ephesians 2:11-22 (New International Version)**

“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)— “remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, “by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, “and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. “He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. “For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. “In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. “And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

“God’s Household”

The Rev. Lisa J. Durkee

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

“And he was of the house and lineage of David.” I imagine there are many among us for whom this flows trippingly off the tongue. Then, some of us might pause to say, “when and where do I know that from?” Of course it is in our Christmas readings, because Jesus’ family is from David’s house. Our passage from Samuel today is very punny, really, because we first hear about a “house” for the ark of the covenant, but by the end of the reading, we know that God is promising that David’s family line will prosper. And therefore so do we, because it is from

David's line that Jesus is descended. The house that God builds for David and his family so far surpasses anything that they as humans might have constructed for him and the ark. It is easy to hear a bit of easy humor as God speaks to Nathan in the night. "did I ever tell you to build me a house? I'll show you how to build a house . . .

Move forward just over one thousand years, and we shouldn't be surprised to hear in Paul's words to the church at Ephesus very familiar language. This is God's house we're hearing about here. There is so much going on in these three paragraphs, but I want to begin with the last part of what we heard from Paul. In it, we hear this beautiful metaphor of the construction of the house of God.

"<sup>19</sup>Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, <sup>20</sup>built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. <sup>21</sup>In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup>And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

"In him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." Do you know that this means you? And it means me, and it means so many more people than we can imagine. Who do you imagine here in God's house with you? For the people of Ephesus receiving this letter, Paul was explaining something very simple, but which had eluded them until this point. The barriers that used to divide them—and us—are gone with Jesus Christ. In Christ, the cornerstone of each of our individual faith and of the Body of Christ that is the Church, "the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord."

Our individual hostilities and our individual barriers are very different in some respects from those of the Ephesians. We no longer make such notable reference to the separation of Gentile and Jew, of circumcised and uncircumcised. We don't struggle in exactly the same way to know which of us has the right sense of the church and of God's word. Sure we do! The Church in the world today also has its separations and we sure have continued hostility and distrust. Don't we? As Arland Hultgren, a professor at Luther Seminary reminds us in a discussion of this text, "It is good to remind all that the church is not just what we make of it. If it is true to itself, it knows it has apostolic foundations which guide its life." He goes on to say, "It is a sad fact that, even though the world is shrinking and we have possibilities of communication like never before, the world is fragmented into so many different groups and camps. The church can model the barrier-free life that Christ has brought."

I was thinking of this passage while I was away on vacation. I inevitably get into conversations with people about church, or as most people put it, "about religion." From Colorado, it was in a conversation with a friend I hadn't spoken to in over thirty years. He was not surprised to learn that I had become a minister. I was surprised to learn that he has gone to church almost every Sunday for the past thirty years. As he said, "once a Lutheran, always a Lutheran, and I wanted my daughters to have the same foundation I had so they would have it to come back to." That sounded very familiar, but when we got into more particulars, I learned that our perspectives have diverged quite widely in thirty years—from the sense of what God does and doesn't require of us to how widely God loves all God's children. We went on to talk about many of our other friends from Gunnison, CO in 1985, several of whom we know have since died, and others we assume have died, given some of their behavior, and not only on the ski slopes. Some were

struggling to find work; others were struggling to stay sober; still others were simply searching for a center. I would now say that they were in all likelihood searching for God, whether they knew it or not. They were searching for a physical answer to what was a spiritual problem. They were more than a little lost.

I am never surprised to find similarities among teachings from fairly diverse spiritual teachers. I also should no longer be surprised when focus prompts from the online meditation I read each morning happen to correspond with any given Sunday's theme. From Tuesday of this week, a quotation from Jiddu Krishnamurti may speak to some of you, as well, as Krishnamurti lived and taught a sense of spirituality that could be defined almost entirely through an understanding of compassion. What we know to call "love of neighbor" is an idea that he shared in various ways, with some very specific notions of how to cultivate it. Hear these words: "We eventually learn that spirituality is not about leaving life's problems behind, but about continually confronting them with honesty and courage. It is about ending our feeling of separation from others by healing our relationships with parents, co-workers, and friends. It is about bringing heightened awareness and compassion to our family life, careers, and community service."

Doing all of these things is why some of us come to church. We know that by ourselves we can be lured into thinking that separation can bring us the comfort we seek and the joy we desire. We know, or perhaps we are simply here to check out whether it may be true that church community is different from others. We have heard rumors that love really is the answer, and we know that loving widely and well sometimes needs support, even outside of our families, whether those of blood or our choosing.

Somehow, I don't imagine my friend from Oklahoma being open to hearing words of wisdom from a South Indian gentleman of the last century. We didn't speak at all about the persons of our faith, but I enjoyed talking with my friend about church and about God. For me, my understanding of building community, of loving, and knowing God is particularly nuanced, but somehow, we didn't get around to Jesus in getting caught up and in reminiscing. I have felt like calling him back, or writing something in our next correspondence. I imagine that one of his daughters might somehow, strangely make her way here from Oklahoma. Maybe she would need a connection, a relationship that unlike any she had been able to find in her usual circles. Maybe our own children will be one of those wandering ones in their twenties, working to figure out where they fit in the scheme of the world, and will cross the threshold of a church because it is warmly familiar.

Maybe it is any number of the new folks who come to worship here. It might be that they are looking for a new teaching; for a new hope. They may well be looking for the welcome and acceptance they haven't met before. This is the place that they can do it. This is God's house and God's household. We can furnish it with love and an outpouring of generous hospitality. Here, we can practice healing divisions, building and rebuilding relationships as we "end the feeling of separation from others." We can borrow the language of Quakers and see "that of God in every person," even when we disagree; even when we get stuck thinking about character traits that irk us or circumstances that bother us. Then, we can turn from God's house to our own homes, and nurture them with love and generosity, as well. We can remember our connection to the line of David, the apostles, and the cornerstone who is Jesus Christ himself, and we can build our hopes and our promises there.

Throughout this week, I have been humming and even singing aloud a song by Karla Bonoff that I know from a recording that Bonnie Raitt made. I'm sure that returning to Blue Hill and to Camden, to my girls and to Mark, is what brought it to mind, or maybe my having first learned it in the mountains 35 years ago. Let's figure out, together, how it is that we make our church a home so that we may sing of it: "Traveling at night, the headlights were bright, and we've been up many an hour. And all through my brain came the refrain of home and its warming fire. And Home sings me of sweet things. My life there has its own wings to fly over the mountains, though I'm standing still." We are not exactly standing still. We are moving forward with history behind us and hope in front of us, hope for a life filled with compassion, with forgiveness and with joy. May it be so for us.