

SERMON JULY 18, 2021

PROPER 11 (16)

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Year B: 2 Samuel 7:1-14a; Psalm 23; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

In the name of the true and living God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer

David is so VERY human.

He assumes that God wants what he wants. He has a comfortable House of Cedar, therefore God must want a comfortable House of Cedar.

But NO!

God doesn't want a House of Cedar. And even if he did, he still wouldn't want DAVID to build it for him!

Why not, we might ask?

We could engage in scholarly inquiry. We have lots of resources for that in our community.

But let's try something different:

Let's PLAY with the Bible.

Let's push it, and see how it reacts. Let's shake it a little and see what falls out.

Because sometimes PLAYING WITH THE BIBLE is the most faithful way to read it. The best way to find our place in it, get a sense of what it REALLY means for US in our context.

So, let's NOT ask "why not David?" in a scholarly way. Instead, let's ask, "What's the big idea about a House of Cedar? Why is that better than the Tabernacle?"

Good question. But first: What's a Tabernacle?

Turn and point to the Tabernacle behind and to the left of the altar, and say...
That's a Tabernacle. The place we keep consecrated bread and wine.

We call it a Tabernacle because the Tabernacle is where God had been "moving about" (First Reading), where God "lived" when David decided to build God a House of Cedar.

This original Tabernacle was the home of the "ark of God," the Ark of the Covenant.

Yes, that ark. The big gold box that held the tablets of the law – and maybe a jar of manna and Moses' staff that saved the People of God from the poisonous snakes. You remember the stories.

God told the people how to make the Tabernacle & the Ark. And God promised that Moses could always find God in the Tabernacle whenever the people needed God. It was a very special and important place.

It was also a tent – a fancy tent with a fancy cloth fence – but it was a tent, designed to be packed up and moved.

In fact, a big part of what made the Tabernacle the place God could ALWAYS be found, was the fact that it was NOT permanent, the People of God could take the Tabernacle WITH them, whenever and wherever God's spirit led them.

We tell this story of the Ark and the Tabernacle in Godly Play, remembering that you can't just walk right up to mystery without getting ready. If you're not ready, you're likely to walk right through without even noticing.

David is not getting ready anymore. He's settling in. He lives in a fine house **of Cedar**, a permanent house, whose purpose is status, not presence.

Where David lives is not just a building, it's a household, where David lives out his relationships with God and others.

And in David's household, the relationships don't work very well. They're marked by unfaithfulness and disrespect, and rape and murder and all sorts of personal & political dysfunction.

The Tabernacle ALSO isn't JUST a mobile home. The Tabernacle organizes the People's relationship to God and to each other.

God DESIGNED every aspect of the Tabernacle, placing it in the very center of the People, and organizing the tribes around it, so that everyone is rightly related to everyone else and to God.

These two houses could not be more different. Almost nothing commends a house "like David's" as an improvement over the Tabernacle.

Thankfully, David's household isn't the only model for a House of Cedar,

Because God allowed David's son Solomon to build the Temple when he became King. That Temple was eventually destroyed by the Babylonian forces of King Nebuchadnezzar II. We tell this story also in Godly Play, The Exile and the Return – perhaps you remember it from last October?

Long after that, Herod the Great built a second Temple, the one Jesus Knew. It was destroyed by the Romans, not that long after they crucified him.

According to Jewish tradition, both Temples were destroyed on the same day, 9th day of the month of Av, Tisha B'Av. A day of such sorrow and longing that it will be remembered even in the Olam Ha'Bah, the world to come, when everyone and everything has been restored to wholeness.

This year, the Jewish year 5781, Tisha B'Av falls on July 18. Today.
Today, there is still no Temple in Jerusalem.

However, Churches as houses of God do exist, and after more than a year of working to come close to God and each other in the cyber-wilderness of Zoom and Facebook, some have begun the return to Church buildings.

And to the opportunity to reconsider how the building organizes relationships with God and with each other.

Is the Church a House of Cedar like David's?

Some Christians wonder if we really need church buildings, noting that the Church-as-Body-of-Christ, is the PEOPLE and not the building. Some Christians also believe Jesus replaced the Temple.

Church buildings can be expensive to maintain, and challenging to adapt to changing neighborhoods and changing lifestyles. Unlike the fancy-tent-Tabernacle, buildings of stone also can't be packed up and physically taken with us, when and where the spirit guides.

Valid points, but only the beginning of the discussion.

Parishioner and choir member Katie Schmidt, recently reflected on this very question in her blog, Choral Vicar (<https://choralvicar.livejournal.com/9527.html>).

She concluded that the church building does participate in ministry – and maybe even is its own ministry – a “stone-etched testimony of Word & Sacrament.”

You’ll find a link to her blog in the print version of this sermon.

Her cite of a verse from Psalm 127, “Unless the Lord builds the house, their labor is in vain who build it,” took me back to David, but with a fresh insight:

The Tabernacle was built according to God’s specifications – and ALL the people participated in God’s plan – they donated SO MUCH their gifts had to be turned away.

When God rejects David’s plan for the House of Cedar, God says, “YOU’RE not going to build a house FOR ME. I’M going to build a house for YOU.”

And so, I realized,

In order to answer the question about what kind of house the church is for God,

in order to find OUR place as St. Andrew’s in THIS story,

we need to remember that WE did not build this house, that we do NOT serve God's house. God's house serves us, by

Orienting our lives toward God, each other, and those outside our walls;

Gathering us for nourishment, to be fed and loved **SO THAT** we can feed and love others;

The Church is Tabernacle when it is
a beacon of God's love and welcome, that we can take with us wherever the spirit leads us,

Offering Sanctuary in the City, and

Growing in God's love, And

Seeking the renewal of the world, for ALL.

AMEN.