

2 Samuel 7:1-17  
Acts 17:22-28

14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Midway Presbyterian Church  
August 29, 2021

## **Has Anyone Been Saved Here Lately?**

### *Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson*

In our Old Testament Lesson today we read of God's Covenant with David. David wants to build a house for the Lord. But the Lord doesn't want or need a house and prefers living in a tent. However, God will build the House of David, a people who will be instrumental in the history of salvation. Listen to these words from 2 Samuel 7:1-17...

### *Introduction to the New Testament Lesson*

In our New Testament Lesson from the second of Luke's two-volume work, we find part of Paul's Areopagus address. Echoing our Lesson from Second Samuel, we hear that God does not live in temples made by men, yet in him we live and move, and have our being. Listen to these words from Acts 17:22-28...

### *Sermon*

In our scripture from 2 Samuel, King David had, probably for the first time, his own wood and masonry home. For a nation at the end of war, it became a symbol of peace and security for himself and for his people. After his many years of running over the Palestinian mountains with foot soldiers, and after his own exile by King Saul, walking into his own home must have been quite a pleasure! David was satisfied.

There *is* satisfaction in owning one's own home. It has to do with the pride of possession. There can also be a financial value if the home appreciates, and certainly most homes have seen significant appreciation recently. And there can be tax advantages. On the other hand, some repairs can be quite expensive.

There is also the sense of permanence. Families tend to remain in communities longer if they own their homes. That stability can bring security to family and personal life. Children may suffer when there is no feeling of permanence, no sense of place. For many people, just the thought of the family home, even though it may have been sold several times since, conjures up feelings of warmth and belonging.

Frederick Buechner wrote a book entitled, *The Longing for Home*. In the opening chapter he says:

I was born in 1926 and therefore most of my childhood took place during the years of the Great Depression of the thirties. As economic considerations kept my father continually moving from job to job, we as a family kept moving from place to place with the result that none of the many houses we lived in ever became home for me.

[Home] was a large white clapboard house that belonged to my maternal grandparents and was located in a suburb of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, called East Liberty....

What was there about that house that made it home in a way that all the other houses of my childhood never even came close to being? The permanence of it was part of the answer—the sense I had that whereas the other houses came and went, this one was there always and would go on being there for as far into the future as I could imagine....

But back to David.... David was so pleased with his home that he began to feel conscience stricken, because the Ark of the Lord was still housed in a tent. That's when he decided to do something great for God!

Why is it that we so often wait until we have our own house in order before we attempt to do great things? We wait until the children are grown before we take the trip we always wanted, when maybe the children would have enjoyed going on a shorter one with us. We wait until we are retired to do something we've always wanted to do, and then health does not permit. We say we'll get involved in a Bible study group or a service ministry, after this or after that. We say

we'll begin to be serious about giving to the church when the kids are out of school. Many missed opportunities! Many needs unmet! So many great things to be done for God, but we procrastinate.

“See now,” said David, “I dwell in a house of cedar,  
but the Ark of God dwells in a tent.” (7:2a)

David wanted to build a temple as a fitting place for God to live. It was to house the Ark of the Covenant. “Yes,” said Nathan the prophet, “God bless you!” He was as eager as we are to encourage someone on a great project for God.

But God told Nathan that no building permit was to be issued. It may have taken some clearing of his throat the next morning for the prophet to explain his change of position to the king, but the message came out loud and clear: “You are not to build a house for God!” Apparently, David had not consulted the Lord about this building project. God’s plans may not be our plans.

The reasons for not encouraging David to build a house for God are varied in Scripture. In 1 Kings we are told that he was too busy. In 1 Chronicles we are told that as a warrior he had shed too much blood to be a house builder for God. But our scripture here in 2 Samuel gives the theological reason.

First of all, Nathan says to David, “God needs no house!” To build one would show a misunderstanding of the nature of God. The tent declares God’s freedom and mobility. God does not desire a house of luxury and security. The eternal, transcendent God cannot be contained in a structure and will not be domesticated. For God goes where he wills. He goes where his people are. Jesus said:

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there  
among them. (Mt. 18:20)

God's dwelling place is the people he is shaping for himself. That was well-illustrated in the moveable tent as a home for the Ark. More than that, the tent for the Ark in the wilderness was not intended to be seen as the abode of God. It was the place where God met with his people. For that reason, it was called the Tent of Meeting. (See Ex. 33:7-11.) God meets with his people on the frontiers, on the mountaintops, and in the valleys.

He's with Midway Presbyterian Church as we elect new Elders to serve and lead. He's with us as we address the coming changes in the community. He's with us as we support charitable organizations. He's with us as we reach out to the sick and shut in. As we engage in Sunday School and sing in the choir.

In Genesis 28, when Jacob had his dream at Bethel and he saw the ladder going up to heaven and the angels of God going up and down the ladder, he was not in the temple. He was out in a lonely place where he had to use a stone for a pillow. But when Jacob woke from his sleep he said:

Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!

And he was afraid and said,

How awesome is this place!  
This is none other than the house of God,  
And this is the gate of heaven. (Gen. 28:16-17)

It was the apostle Paul who put it so well in his sermon to the people of Athens that we read from Acts 17 this morning:

The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands. (v. 24)

To localize God in a house tends to give more attention to the house than to God. And we can be so focused on maintaining the church building, its furnishings, the landscape outside,

that we lose touch with the God to whom all of these are dedicated. We can become so occupied in the governmental workings of the church that we lose our missionary zeal. Let us build our houses of worship and properly maintain them, but not at the expense of the benevolent and mission program of the church. We may properly erect sanctuaries “to the glory of God,” but such edifices must remain in the category of an “upper room, furnished,” where we commune with Christ, remembering him in the bread and the cup, and from which, having “sung a hymn,” we go out to bear witness to the gospel, to minister to the manifold needs of men and women and children, to follow Christ across the frontiers of life as we know it.

In his book, *The Salty Tang*, Fred Speakman tells the story of a Midwestern grandmother. Her children saved up money to send her on a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Europe. With a London tour group, she was guided through the famous Westminster Abbey. In a memorized sort of way, the guide explained some of the parts of the building and the art pieces. But then the grandmother interrupted: “That’s all very well, young man, but tell me, has anyone been saved here lately?” This woman raises the same issue as the writer of our text. Of what purpose is a house for God? Of what purpose is the church? Is God being glorified? Is anyone being saved here?

From David’s comfortable house, we have looked at his plans for a house for God which he would not build, because God preferred a tent. Now we move to another *house*. In a careful play on words, Nathan gives God’s instructions to David.

“Would you build me a house to dwell in? No, I will build *you* a house!”

Herein a great prophecy comes to a climax. Yes, *house* can mean a place to live, but it can also mean a dynasty, a family, a lineage. David is not to make a house (a dwelling) for God, but God is going to make a house (a people) for David that will be established forever—the House of David! David is not to be the house builder. God is!

It is from these words of God to King David that the hope of the Messiah was founded. David would have a family and one of his family, his house, his descendants, would always rule.

Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me;  
your throne shall be established forever. (2 Sam. 7:16)

Here an eternal covenant is declared between God and the House of David. Over and over again this promise is repeated in the Old Testament. The history of the Jewish kingdom hinges on it, and so does the history of salvation. Even after the fall and destruction of Jerusalem, the hope for the everlasting kingdom of David continued. Throughout the exile, people of faith clung to that hope.

And in the fullness of time, the promise was fulfilled! It was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, whose family tree is given so carefully in the first chapter of Matthew, so as to declare that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of David! His kingdom is made sure and his throne established. It is in the person of Jesus Christ that God himself moved into the human scene to live with his people. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. In him we behold the glory of the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn. 1:14) He is the Tent of Meeting. And the people of his saving are his house.

My friends, God is still keeping his promise to David. God is still providing a house, a people. By his Spirit he still calls people into his family. People are being saved. In this family, God is present. He will dwell with the humble, the contrite, the faithful. The eternal, holy God of all creation will be with us today, tomorrow, and forever. Thanks be to God!

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.