

LIFE AS A HOUSE
A Sermon On 2 Samuel 7:1-14a
July 19, 2009
David G. Gladstone

And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 2 Samuel 7:10ff

Today we continue our journey through the saga of 1 and 2 Samuel and the developing story of King David. Our journey has not been systematic. We have jumped around and used each story as a vehicle to reflect upon what it means for us to live as People of the Way. A few weeks ago we considered the familiar story of David and Goliath and I talked about how trust in God empowers us to confront the giants we meet in life. Last week, with the New Reformation Jazz Band firing our spirits, we considered David's dance before the Ark of the Covenant and I talked about our need to be authentic in our joy in the Lord. I suggested that much of what passes for religious devotion is really a posturing meant to impress people rather than God. Today we come to a less familiar point in the King David story. The question before us has to do with dwellings. Where shall David live and where shall God live? Who shall build the house? Who shall build the Temple of the Lord? As with all things Biblical, accessing the richness and the power of the text require that we embrace the story as metaphor. Using the language of construction what we have here is a reflection on spiritual grounding.

These three stories from the Hebrew testament present a scriptural framework that has suddenly taken on new meaning in my life. In the political jargon of our day they are

the three legs of a solid spiritual stool that I pray Terry I can rely upon in the months ahead. These three foundational points are:

1. Evil can only be faced through radical trust in God using the tools and the talents God has given us. That is the David and Goliath story
2. Authentic relationship to God is what counts in a crisis. Public religious posturing will not do. That is the message of David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant.
3. Building a solid spiritual home is God's work in our hearts. That is what I get from today's text.

Everything changed for us last week with the diagnosis of Terry's cancer. This new reality has turned our world upside down. Vacation is canceled in favor of radiation and chemo therapy. Mary's October wedding to Andrew Highland no longer commands the family attention, and must now find its place sandwiched between the end of therapy and the day of surgery. Long range plans fade in favor of whatever it is that must be done on any given day. Panic erodes our confidence. Our arrogant expectation of good health is now shattered and we are confronted with the reality that life is just as fragile for us as it is for anyone else.

Stepping out of my preaching responsibilities for a moment, let me tell you that Terry and I are deeply touched and moved by your many expressions of love and support as you have become aware of this development. We are not people who will suffer in silence just for the sake of putting on a good front. We will ask for help when we know what help we need. When we ask, it will be because we trust and honor the sincerity of your offer. To everything there is a season; a time to serve and a time to be served by others. I'll tell you this. I now know that sincerely offering your help is itself therapeutic. The answer to your question, "What can we do?" is simple. In asking you

have already done it. You have extended your love and support. We are not alone and we know it. We thank God every day for the caring heart of this congregation. I must say one more thing. As serious and as frightening as this development is, optimism is justified. The next ten months will be rough, but we expect the treatments to be effective and Terry's recovery to ultimately be complete. So many others, so many of you, have faced similar or worse things before us. We will not pretend that this is more important because it is our reality. No one has a privileged position exempting them from disease. That is the bad news. Likewise, no one stands beyond the reach of God's love, forgiveness and healing. That is the good news. That is the Gospel.

Back to the text and to my privilege of addressing you each and every week. In this part of the King David saga David comes to a respite from the wars that have unified all of Israel. He remarks that he has a fine house of cedar, but the Ark of the Covenant, the physical representation of God, still resides in a tent. David desires to build a Temple. The prophet, Nathan, tells David that he has heard the word of the Lord. Nathan says that God does not want David to build a Temple. That will be left to another generation. Instead God desires that David continue to lead the people of Israel and fulfill God's plan for them. When it comes to houses, David has in mind an agenda of political power. God has something different in mind. The house God wants built is a house of faith and hope. God tells David that he, the Lord, will take care of it.

Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 2 Samuel 7:10ff

It's all metaphor. Instead of "house" think "life" David confuses structure and spirit. This is not about cedar and brick. This is about heart. When Ken Medema was

with us in May he sang a song near the end of the concert that asked the question, “How do you build a Love House?”

Consider the text of that song:

**How do you build a Love House?
 How do you make it strong?
 How do you build a Love House?
 So it will last you long.
 Oh well you cannot build a Love House
 With wood and brick and glass.
 It takes talkin’
 And workin’
 And playin’
 And dreamin’
 To make a Love House last.**

The reality of Terry’s illness has brought a spiritual clarity to my life. The evil of this disease can only be addressed by a radical trust in God and in the tools and the talents God has given us. What counts more than anything in this moment of trial is the authenticity of our journey with God. A great show of religiosity will not do. In spite of this unwelcome new reality the purpose of life in Christ remains the same. God is love and our task is to live accordingly. Metaphorically speaking, life is a house. I want to make sure that our life is a Love House. How do you build a Love House? It takes talkin’, and workin’, and playin’, and dreamin’ to make a Love House last.

THANKS BE TO GOD.

2 Samuel 7:1 - 14 (NRSV)

¹Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." ³Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you." ⁴But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. ⁷Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders^o of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" ⁸Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹²When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings.