

“The LORD will Make you a House”

2 Samuel 7:1-13, 16-19a

Matthew 9:35-38

We remember that David didn't come from a royal bloodline or a noble family. His father was a farmer who had sheep. And David was the youngest one who kept the sheep and protected them from wolves and other threats. God anointed David to be the next king of Israel even though Saul was still king. So, there followed many years of David trying to serve the king, to be faithful and loyal. He defeated Goliath, he won victory in battle – each time he attributed his success to the good of the land. He played the lyre to try to soothe Saul, but Saul lashed out at him and tried to kill him, chasing him from town to town.

So, David starts to build some alliances and continue to battle against Israel's enemies. He meets people from all over and they start to love him more and more. He marries women from many different areas, which further cements the connection of family and care. When Saul and his son Jonathan fall in battle, the people of Judah enthusiastically embrace David as king while the northern kingdom found another to be their king. For seven and half years, David rules Judah from the city of Hebron. When the king of the northern kingdom died, scripture tells us that all the tribes of Israel found David at Hebron and told him, “look, we are your bone and flesh” – like saying “we're your flesh and blood.” They said “while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The Lord said to you – it is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel.”

And so, all twelve tribes – both kingdoms North and South united with David as their king. He was thirty years old. One of the first things he did was to call up an army to march on Jerusalem to make it the new capital of the nation. To celebrate the great victory and his new

start as leader, he called for a procession to bring up the Ark of the Covenant, which was about 9 miles away from Jerusalem at the time.ⁱ

So, when our scripture passage starts out by telling us that the king settled in his house and that God granted him rest from his enemies – you better believe that this young king needed a moment to catch his breath and take it all in. It’s a bit tricky for us to keep up with David’s personal life – exactly how many wives and concubines he had and exactly how many children. We do know that David had at least six sons by six wives when he left Hebron.

Now that David has taken a moment to pause and reflect, he sees all that he has – all the victory and blessing and success. Perhaps he hears his children giggling and playing in the next room, being cuddled by their mothers or teased by their siblings. He looks around and says – how can I be so settled down, living in a house of cedar, when the ark of God is still in a tent. How can I be so nailed down if the ark of the covenant is still on the move at a moment’s notice?

He calls in the prophet Nathan and says – this is what I want to do. I want to build God a house. I want there to be a place where we can see – not just me, but all the people – we need to see that God is with us. As fancy and ornate and beautiful as my own palace is, God’s house needs to be more, better, fancier, worthy of who God is and what God has done for us. Nathan tells him to follow his heart because God is with him.

But the thing is – yeah, God is with him, but...that doesn’t mean God asked him to build a house. Nathan has this vision and it’s got to be a bit uncomfortable. Nathan acting as a prophet has just rubber-stamped the king’s building project when, suddenly, that very night, there comes the word of the Lord. God says, “are you the one to build me a house to live in?” In no uncertain terms, God tells Nathan – don’t you think if I wanted a house, I would have asked for one? Do you doubt that I was with you even before you were a people or when you were a wandering

people or an enslaved people or a lost people or anything else? God says – I am the one who will plant you, I am the one who will bless you, I am the one who will give you peace from war and from evildoers. God says – you want to make me I house? I am God! I will make you a house and it will mean life, offspring, a kingdom, a name, a legacy, a hope, a promise. That is not something that you can give to me. That is something that only I can give to you. Nathan tells David and he is humbled and he prays his gratitude.

God promises David life – many generations to come. It being Father's Day today – this passage ties so easily into the ancient, echoing call towards parenthood that many of us share. I got to thinking of a number of years ago, when ISIS was first forming. I read an exposé from someone who had been on the inside of that terrorist group and was now telling the world who they were, what they believed, what they planned to do, and why. It was an uncomfortably close portrait of violent extremists who zealously believed that their schemes of terror and attacks against the innocent were pleasing to God. They thought that they were the only virtuous ones and that they were the first step towards ushering in God's judgment against the evils and perversions of every other society on the planet. They wanted to destroy everyone so that the end of the world would come and they would be embraced and lavishly rewarded in heaven.

Reading that article made me feel sick – that anyone could twist religious teachings to believe and convince others that God demands the blood of the innocent. But at the same time, deep in my soul I felt that familiar longing for children. The innermost part of me stared right into the face of this hatred and doom and despair and said – no. This is not the future God wants and this is not the future God promises us. And I suddenly realized that the most hopeful thing any human could possibly do is to have children, to love them and care for them and raise them – whether they are natural born, adopted, mentored, or anything else. Having and loving and

raising up children is taking a revolutionary stand. It says – I believe that there is a future, a time when things will be even better than they are now, and I want my child to be a part of it. Having children says that I believe in the good that may yet be more than the evil anyone threatens to do.

I think that's a lot of the heart of parental instincts – it's faith and devotion. I imagine that David was feeling similarly as he boldly proclaimed that he would build a house for the Lord. He wanted his children to grow up in a place and in a time where they could know peace and where they could worship the Lord in a fixed, safe place. He didn't want them (or his people) to be afraid of being run out of their homes or to wonder where they might meet the Lord in worship from week to week. He wanted them to have a family home and a faith home and he wanted to be a part of making that happen. This, to me, shows us that David had a father's love in his heart.

But God said no. And, yes, God does seem to scold David a bit through the prophet Nathan, but I think it's a pretty mild, affectionate scolding. Because the problem isn't that David has lost faith that God is among them – if his faith were failing, he probably wouldn't have even thought of building God a house. I think the problem is that David has decided that he's going to do everything, fix everything for his children and his people's children. But we weren't called to do every job – we were called to do the work that God gives us.

When God responds in this vision, God is saying to David – you are a shepherd and a warrior; you are a kingdom uniter and a musician. But this work, this work belongs to your son – let him be the builder; let go so that he can follow his calling just as you have followed yours. Ultimately, we can't save our children from the world and we can never solve all of its problems for the next generation. What we can do is engage what is before us as best as we can and trust that the next generation will pick up the baton and go places we couldn't dream of. Indeed, the

son of David that would build the Temple was Solomon and he wasn't even born yet. David hadn't even met his mother yet at this point.

When Jesus walked the earth, he travelled widely so that he could teach and preach and heal as many as he could, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of heaven. He saw so many lost in crowds who carried so many burdens that they walked in weariness. They were like sheep without a shepherd – not sheep in the sense that they were unintelligent, but sheep in that they were scared and had a hard time finding focus and direction. Jesus looked at all of these people who were thirsting for justice and righteousness and hope and community and he spoke to his disciples. See all of these people – they need you and you will be enough for them. Do not be afraid to go to them in love and do what you can do here and now. Let go of your need to perfectly understand and control and chart out the future in tidy graphs and to do lists. Trust me, God holds everything together. Just go out to the people because, “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.”

None of us are doing quite what we planned right now, but God is still with us. None of us know how all of this is going to turn out – what kind of aftermath or societal change or what – but we are not sheep without a shepherd. None of us can control what the generations of the future will choose to do with what we give them, but we are still called to sow, to tend, to harvest, and give thanks to God. Sometimes, like David, we leap off into the wrong direction, but God will always guide us back. The Spirit surrounds us every moment, it fills us with every breath, and it will challenge us if we listen in time of quiet. In this we know that God loves us and dwells with us – that God comes to us in the church, in our homes, in our lives, and in our hearts. Thanks be to God. Amen.

ⁱ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiriath-Jearim>