

Ephesians 2:11-22

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision" — a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands — remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

2 Samuel 7:1-14a

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the 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." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you."

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I 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. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" Now 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; and 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. 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, from 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. When 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. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.

God's Big, Big, House

July 22, 2018

A man had been stranded on a desert island for 20 years. One day, he saw a cruise ship which had anchored unusually close to shore in order to permit a little snorkeling. Catching someone's attention, the man was taken on board. After getting himself cleaned up and dressed, he was invited to the captain's table for dinner.

"So," asked the captain, "how did you manage to survive by yourself all those years?"

The castaway pointed at the porthole and said: "By the grace of God. You see those three huts out there on the beach?"

"I see them," said the captain. "You must spend a lot of time in them."

"That's right," he said. "In the middle hut I live, cook my fish and sleep in a hammock that I made for myself. The hut on the right is where I go to church. Never miss a Sunday. I celebrate Christmas and Easter, give myself communion once a month, and even hold a revival every other year. That's why I've been able to survive so long ... by attending church regularly."

"Amazing," said the captain. "So what about the hut on the left?"

"Oh, that's where I used to go to church." Now that's funny I don't care who you are.

When I was in college my first wife and I had many professors, who attended the church we went to who became our friends and extended family. Our math professor and his wife and two boys quickly became our favorite family to spend time with. John and Sue Whittle. They were both from Kentucky, and something that I continue to remember to this day is that whenever we would go to their house for dinner or lunch after church, John would always say as we came in the door, "Come in this house." It always made us feel that we belonged, that this was a safe place to be, that we were home. It is a saying that I try to use in my life as well and particularly when I think about the church as we welcome others into the family. Come in this house!

Both our lessons this morning strike me as having a theme that connects them and I'll do my best to make that connection for you. That theme I think, is God's house, and how we think about what that house should look like, and what God thinks it should look like. There was a praise song that was all the rage a few years ago, and one I still hear today, it is called, *Big House* by a band called Audio Adrenaline. My students often sang it and it even has choreography with it. Some of the lyrics go like this:

I don't know where you lay your head or where you call your home. I don't know where you eat your meals or where you talk on the phone. I don't know if you got a cook a butler or a maid. I don't know if you got a yard with a hammock in the shade.

[PRE-CHORUS]

Come and go with me to my Father's house

Come and go with me to my Father's house

[CHORUS]

It's a big, big house with lots and lots a room. A big, big table with lots and lots of food. A big, big yard where we can play football. A big, big house. It's my Father's house.

*All I know is a big ole house with rooms for everyone. All I know is lots a land where we can play and run.
All I know is you need love and I've got a family. All I know is your all alone so why not come with me?*

Repeat Chorus:

Now I don't know if this is the kind of house that David had in mind for God. I suspect that David, who was in his political and financial heyday, was thinking of something along the lines of the Crystal Cathedral or maybe something grander than that. It makes perfect sense that he would want to do something for God since God had been so good to him and the people. We too, often feel that a physical structure gives honor and glory to God. Unfortunately, we often give the structure so much honor that it becomes a holy relic that no one can touch or

use without being judged by others. Sometimes our holy spaces are off limits to those who don't meet our expectations. This became true of the Jewish Temple as well. And while our sanctuaries give us safety and comfort, a place to worship in freedom; and there is nothing wrong with that, I think this story is about something more.

Furthermore, God has some things to say about who will build his house and what that house will look like and despite David's good intentions, God has to clear some things up for him as he often does for us as well. "Who are you to build a house for me? I haven't lived in a house since the day we left Egypt to this day. I have lived with the people traveling about with them and living in their midst. I never asked you to build me a house. But, let me make you a promise. I will make *you a house!* I will come and dwell within you and you will become a house for me. You will be a house without walls or fences, a house that will leave a legacy of love and forgiveness for all people." (Something Paul speaks to as well.) "I have someone in mind to build a house for me, so let me take care of that. You just keep being the shepherd and prince of my people that I called you to be and let me take care of the rest. Ok?"

Now, like David, we like to keep God in a box, don't we? (and the irony of a statement like that is that literally, God was in a box. The ark was just a big old box, wasn't it? But let's try to think metaphorically this morning; or, outside the box, pardon the pun.)

We are just foolish enough to believe that we can control God and place him in our sanctuaries and make him a reflection of our own ideas, theologies, and ideologies. We use our understanding of God to make rules and build walls that make us feel safe and keep the riffraff out. We're good at that, and there is a boatload of stories that we can share about that. But the truth is, God doesn't live in a temple or a cathedral. God won't be boxed up or nailed down. All I can think of when I read this account is that God lives in a tent. God lives among the people. A tent is something you can roll up and carry in your backpack. The Lord is always ready to go, and always on the move! "Don't fence me in", as that old cowboy song goes! God is out camping among the people and sometimes we are sitting here in the box.

So, what kind of temple is God building? Which brings us to our passage in Ephesians this morning where I think we see the best picture of the kind of house that God wants to build for the world. Because in this passage we see that Jesus is the house that God is building, and in him, we are reconciled to one another. Those who were far away and those who are near, all are brought together in the *peace* that comes through Christ Jesus. The whole building of God is built on this cornerstone and foundation, and together we grow into a holy temple in Christ. We become a dwelling place for God.

That as you abide *In Christ, You*, are the church. This is what we come to at last. That as we live and move in the circle of Christ's Love, each and every one of us is the church, the temple, the sanctuary. This building is not the church. You are the church. And Jesus calls us to be the church in the world. A church that flings wide the doors and knocks down the walls that separate us. To be a house with no walls to divide and no rooms that separate. That all those who were without hope and all those with hope may be united as one in *His big, big, house* where the table is wide, and the door is always open. A church that is ever expanding its walls to include all of God's children no matter what. Which has nothing at all to do with a building.

In one of my commentaries, I read this wonderful story by missionary and author Rita Snowden. It is a story from World War II. "In France, some soldiers with their sergeant brought the body of a dead comrade to a French cemetery to have their friend buried there. The priest told them gently that it was a Roman Catholic cemetery, and he was bound to ask if their comrade had been a baptized member of the Roman Catholic Church. They said that they did not know. The priest said that he was very sorry, but, if that was the case, he could not permit burial in his churchyard. So the soldiers took their comrade sadly and buried him just outside

the fence of the churchyard. The next day they came back to see that the grave was all right, and to their astonishment, they could not find it. They knew that it was only six feet from the fence of the burying ground, but search as they might they could find no trace of the freshly dug soil. As they were about to leave in perplexed bewilderment, the priest came up. He told them that his heart had been troubled because of his refusal to allow their dead comrade to be buried in the churchyard; so he told them that early in the morning he had risen from his bed, and with his own hands he had *moved the fence* to include the body of the soldier who had died for France.”

The commentator who was William Barclay goes on to say that, “That is what love can do. The rules and regulations put up the fence, but love moved it. Jesus removed the fences between us because He abolishes all religion that is founded on rules and regulations and brought to us-a religion whose foundation is love.”

(William Barclay)

*Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.
built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:
all are welcome; all are welcome; all are welcome in this place.*

Jesus has come to dwell among us, to abide in us as we abide in him, and make within us a sanctuary of peace. I pray that the temple that is you, will find within yourself the deep love and acceptance of God, that you might, like my old friend, stand at the door and shout out to the world, “Come in this House. Come in this House! All, All, All, are welcome!” Thanks be to God. Amen