

Pitching the Tent

December 20, 2020

2nd Samuel 7: 1-11 and 16

¹ Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ² 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."³ Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

⁴ But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵ Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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?"⁸ 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; ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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, ¹¹ 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...

¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

Romans 16: 25-27

²⁵ Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith — ²⁷ to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.



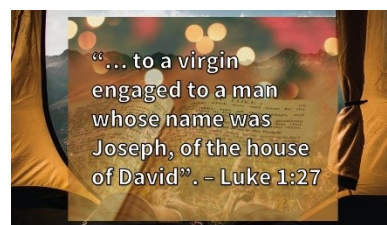
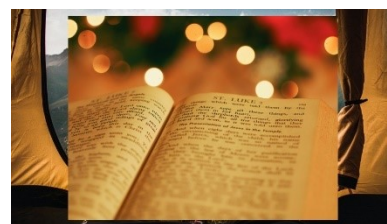
Home is where you can be comfortable, where you feel like you belong, where you can be yourself. For me, I feel at home at 411 Walnut Street in Piedmont, South

Dakota. We have lived there long enough to make it feel like our home. I also have come to feel at home in the church, the place I spend my days and part of an evening or two most weeks. These same things are true for most of you, I would guess. And there are other places that we feel at home, where we feel like we belong, where we feel loved. The image I chose for this morning's message reflects this idea. Although some of you may choose a place different than mine, we all have places we do not physically inhabit for large portions of our lives, yet we still feel at home when we are there. These are places where we each pitch our tent on occasion, places where we happily spend some part of our life.

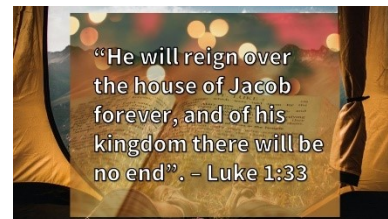
Being in a tent, whether out on a backpacking trip or just out for a night on a winter campout somewhere in the Black Hills is a place where I find rest for my soul, peace for my spirit, and renewal for my faith. I feel at home in a tent out in God's creation. There I feel closely connected to the earth, away from the things of the world. In those outside spaces, I feel God's Spirit is with me.

The first passage that we read today, from 2nd Samuel 7, is all about providing a home – a literal one for God and an eternal one for God's people. The second passage that was read from Romans 16 is about how we make that place our home – both here and now and then one day in eternity. As we begin to think about being at home with God this morning, let us begin with a word of prayer...

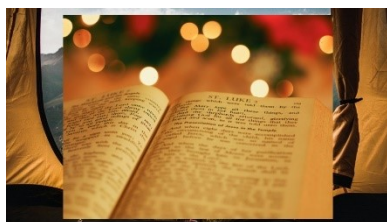
This week in the lectionary readings there are also two passages from Luke 1. The first is the story of Gabriel's visit to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the second contains Mary's song, an eruption of praise and worship to the God who is faithful. In between these passages, Mary pays a visit to her cousin Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, who confirms that God is at work in the world and in the life of Mary. Because these are familiar parts of the Christmas story and because they tie into our passage from 2nd Samuel, please turn with me to Luke 1 as we briefly explore these passages. In verse 27 we read that Gabriel was sent *"to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary"*.



Initially Mary was as we would all be – confused, afraid, unsure. But Gabriel assures her, saying, *"Mary, for you have found favor with God... you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and... the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David... He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end"*.



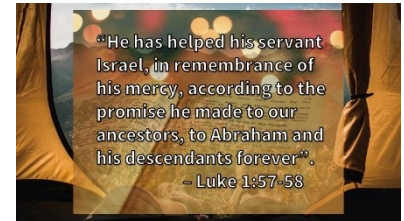
After a bit more explanation concerning how this miracle will unfold, Mary humbly says, *"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word"*. With this mission from God accepted and placed upon her heart, Mary ventures to her cousin Elizabeth's home. Upon her arrival, at the sound of Mary's voice, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy and, in the Spirit, Elizabeth declares to Mary: *"Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb"*. With these words of confirmation and reassurance from her older cousin, now knowing in her heart and soul that all of this is true, Mary responds in song. In verses 46 through 55 of Luke 1 we find what is known as the 'Magnificat' or Mary's Song.



Her song begins with these words, found in verses 46 through 48: *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant"*. Can you hear the joy and trust that Mary has in her God? Mary then sings of God's mercy strength, power, and holiness. She concludes her song with these words, connecting to the words that we will next delve into from 2nd Samuel:

"He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever".

This is the promise that we turn to as we move into the reading from 2nd Samuel 7.



On this 4th Sunday of Advent, as we begin to lean into the idea of coming home, our hearts think of returning to the places and people who formed us – of going home, of being surrounded by family. This leads me to think about God's home. In the passage from 2nd Samuel 7, David finally comes to a place where he feels safe and comfortable, secure and protected. In verse one we read that David felt *"settled"* in his house as he realized that God had *"given him rest from all of his enemies"*. As he reflects on his current home, the palace made of cedar, he realizes that God does not have a real home, that *"God stays in a tent"*. It is a natural thought. For years and years, mankind has built homes for God. Some have been quite simple – like the Puritan meeting halls - and some have been quite extravagant and elaborate. It must have weighed on David's mind and soul to be residing in fine accommodations while God's presence resided in a tent.

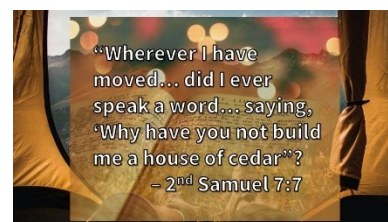
When I think of David's palace, I think of the magnificent cathedrals in Europe that took decades to build and required huge investments of both resources and manpower. Humanity poured much into the building of these grand homes for God, usually in competition with one another, always seeking to build bigger



and higher and grander than the latest, greatest cathedral. Although not within the scope of possibility, I think that this is what David had in mind when he thought about building a home for God. David thought that God needed a home that reflected God's power and might. Nathan, the prophet, agreed with David.

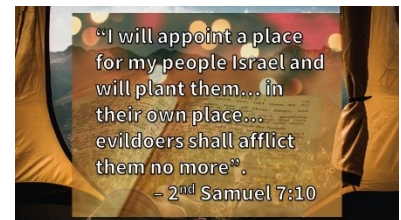
Now, I can be guilty of David's folly, thinking I'll do great things for God. Dreaming up this or that, envisioning how great this idea will work out, I often just put things in motion, not even pausing to invite God to be on the planning team. As you might expect, I usually end up learning a tough, hard lesson. But when I stop to pray, to talk with others, to allow the Holy Spirit to be a part of the plan or project or whatever, then God becomes a part of the effort and usually things go far better than I could ever have imagined. Instead of ending up with something like this cathedral when I go forward without God's guidance and direction, I usually end up with a mess.

Fortunately for David, that very night – the night that David decided to build a home for God – the prophet Nathan received a word from God himself. In verse seven we read these words: *"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'?"* God is saying, 'Excuse me, David, when did I ever ask for a home built by human hands'? Turns out, God is comfortable right where he is, simply being among his people. After reminding David that he took him from *"the pasture"* to the throne, from tending sheep to ruling over God's people, from sleeping out in a tent to resting in the palace,



God reminds David that he has *"been with you wherever you went"*. God had been present to David, and to the people of Israel, every step of the way. God was with the Israelites as Moses led them out of Egypt and through forty years in the desert. God was with them as Joshua led them into the Promised Land, giving the Israelites their promised inheritance. God has been with David every step of the way, right up to this very moment. And not only that, but God goes a step further. You see, God has a building project in mind too. David's palace was built with tribute wood, an expensive price paid by a local king just up the road. In his mind, David thinks that maybe God deserves the same treatment. But God has other building plans. Long-term plans. Great plans to build an eternal home and a kingdom that will last forever.

In verse eight God, through the prophet Nathan, tells David, *"I will make for you a great name"*. It's true. In the end, David is universally recognized as the greatest king that Israel ever had. Speaking about the future yet to come, in verse ten God tells David, *"I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them... in their own place... evildoers shall afflict them no more"*. This place, this place where they are at home, this place where evil is no more, this place where they find their rest, this place where they finally feel like they belong, this place is heaven. One day, all of God's people will experience this perfect eternal home. One day God will provide a forever home for all of his children. This is a place that we long for. It is the place that each of us were created for.



Continuing on in verse sixteen, we hear God's promise to David: *"Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever"*. From the line of David, from the root of Jesse, in just four days, we celebrate that a Savior is born. He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. And he shall reign forevermore. God will remain ever present with the people of God, yes, forever. That is the promise that God made to David. And that is the promise that holds true for all who call upon Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That is our promise: God will reign forevermore.



Just as the people of God had wandered for many years and just as they will continue to have their wanderings, we too are on a similar journey. In this season of

Advent, as we draw closer to Christmas Eve, we begin to feel more and more the sense that God is with us. As we look towards the coming of Emmanuel, God with us, we begin to feel at home once again. Wherever we may be pitching our tents right now, as we celebrate the coming of the Messiah in just four days, we will be reminded in a powerful way that God is still with us. And yet we remain sojourners, a people on a journey towards our true home, our forever home. As we journey through life, we spend most of our time at home spiritually with our Lord. Yet we know that this place – earth – is not truly our home. This place, this wonderful and beautiful place that we call home, is but a temporary residence. As we read in 2nd Corinthians 5:1, *"For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"*. God's promise remains true. Our true home yet awaits. As this body is destroyed, the soul moves heavenward. Thanks be to God.

As joyous as this promise is and as hopeful as this thought makes us, there are people who do not know these truths. For most of these, Christmas is about the presents and the parties, some time off from work and some much-needed rest. Turn with me to Romans 16, Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome that focused on God's plan to make the Gentiles a part of the church. Verses 25 through 27, our passage for today, form the doxology or the closing of the letter. In verses 25 and 26 Paul speaks of *"the mystery that was kept secret for long ages"* that has now been disclosed. Through Jesus and those that followed him, God has grafted or added the Gentiles into the family of God. During Old Testament days, this part of God's plan was not yet revealed. The Jews were "the chosen people".

But beginning with Jesus and the disciples and those that continued to share the good news, all the world has the opportunity to believe in the Messiah, to live in what Paul calls an *"obedience of faith"*. As we think about the joy and hope, the peace and love that we experience through our faith during this season, is it not something that we want all people to know and experience too? This is what Paul is referring to when, in verse 26 he writes, *"according to the command of the eternal God"*. The command is to make disciples of all peoples.

Throughout the ages, we see that God is comfortable pitching the tent wherever and whenever to be with his children. We see that in Jesus' ministry too. During his years of ministry, Jesus had no regular home, no place to lay his head night after night. Jesus was out and about, and he met all people where they were at, becoming fully present to them right then and there, and offering whatever ministry he could to that person or persons.

As I said earlier, a home, a physical place is a human construct. For many hundreds of years, humanity has sought to build a house for God – a place where we can gather to be with God. And for just as long, God has sought to find creative ways to dwell with humanity. In our 2nd Samuel passage, God makes clear his plan to dwell with humanity forever – here for a while but one day forever in the new heaven and earth. In the Luke passages, God reveals the plan to dwell, in the flesh, with humanity for a time. In those years, Jesus was the fuller revelation of God in the world. Jesus set the example for what it looked like to live out God’s love and, dying, he provided way to eternal life. Faith in Jesus Christ is the path to dwelling with God forever. This is the good news that Paul speaks of in our Romans passage. In Paul’s words we again hear the call to share the good news with all people. As we consider our role in being a part of God dwelling within each person, may we act as Jesus did, going to whomever, whenever, and wherever as we seek to build the kingdom of God in this time and place. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. Think about that neighbor or friend or family member who most needs to know Jesus. What can you do this week to move them closer?
- 2) *Pray*. Heaven draws near this week on Christmas Eve. Pray for those who “come” to church to be touched by the love of God found in Christ Jesus.
- 3) *Study*. Read 2nd Samuel 7: 18-29. How would you pray a similar prayer of thanksgiving for your faith and for your faith community?