

“Where God Lives”

2 Samuel 7:1-7

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We continue David's story this morning. This scripture occurs right before a pivotal moment---God promises David a home for the people of Israel and a dynasty for him. This is usually the part preachers focus on. Today instead we focus our hearing on the question of *God's presence* as together we listen for God's word from the 2 book of Samuel, the 7th chapter, beginning with verse 1.

Now when the king dwelt in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies round about, the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart; 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: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt 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 for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?""

How we love our houses. We love to design them, build them, decorate, renovate. We love to improve them, change them, rearrange them. There is something of us in the place we live. We identify with our houses. When we move into a new house, it takes a long time to get used to it. It has to grow on us; it takes time to make new memories.

The home that you grew up in holds a lock on your memory. The first house you bought is still wallpapered with your youthful dreams.

Home has the power to transform us, even as we transform it. Fiction writer Mark Helprin captures this in his story about a Brooklyn Heights brownstone renovation.

Here's the story. The contractor (who is the main character, named Fitch) has a reputation for high quality work, finishing jobs on time, and good value. He is what we might call a 'dream contractor.'

So when Fitch calls his foreman, Gustavo, and tells him to abandon four ongoing projects in order to turn to a new job, Gustavo thinks Fitch has lost his mind.

Fitch has a project he simply cannot turn down. It's more than a job. It's a mission. Gustavo scratches his head, and wonders what they've been called to do---"Is it the White House?"

"No", Fitch says, "nothing like that". "It's not lucrative, but it'll be the best job we've ever done, and we're going to do it [in less than a month]".

"Sometimes you find something that's truly important, and even though it throws everything into disorder you know you have to do it. . .and it gives you new life."

"Let me guess," said Gustavo. "This new job is for a woman."

Fitch's workers drop everything for this job. But not because it's for a woman. They do it because this woman lost her husband when the twin towers went down.

This fictional house renovation story reminds me of a recent real story in the metroplex. You may have read about it in the Dallas Morning News this week. A local contractor was working 24-7 to finish a complete home renovation for a police officer who had been disabled in the line of duty. Even the Commissioner's office got in on the work and pitched in during the 105 degree heat. Never had he turned a home so fast. Never had so much been at stake.

In Helprin's book, Fitch's workers dive into the work. "Without the slightest hesitation, Fitch's men. . . refused pay, committed to staying twenty-four-hour days, and started immediately. . . These people, who had less power over their own lives than anyone Fitch had ever known, were the most generous he had ever encountered."

Wives brought food, men slept in shifts, children came to help sweep and paint. "Fitch paid their fathers well, but upon seeing this he resolved to pay them better.

"A lapsed but believing Catholic, he had not been to Mass since Mass had lapsed out of Latin, but what happened in the weeks of February and March made up for the thousands of Masses he had missed. The Mass existed, in his. . . view, to keep, encourage, and sustain a sense of holiness, and to hold open the channels to grace, that, with age, and discouragement, tend to close.

Witnessing those who had little sacrificing what they had, their children contributing to the work in their way. . . *Fitch felt the divine presence* as he had not since the height of youth."¹

In this wave of generosity and beauty, *Fitch felt God's presence.*

¹ Mark Helprin, *Monday*, in *The Pacific and Other Stories*, pp. 60-69.

King David knew the divine presence. At this point in his story, David wanted to do some construction befitting the Lord God Almighty. Since the King was living in a pretty nice place himself, he thinks it's past time to build a suitable temple for the Lord. A suitable place for the ark.

“No”, says God. God puts the kibosh on David's architectural sketches, pretty much rips them to shreds. God says he doesn't need a house to live in. A tent has been good enough so far, God says, why change things?

The crux of the question facing David, and the question facing us is *Where does God live?* It is a common mistake to think God's presence is automatically connected with a particular place, with a particular theology, with a particular worship practice. It is a common, human error to believe that God is present only in the temple, or the sanctuary.

It is a common mistake to focus on the trappings of the temple, and to neglect the temple of our own lives.

The prophet Jeremiah warned of this common deception in his great temple sermon:

“This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!’ If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow. . .then I will let you live in this place. . .”

(Jeremiah 7: 3-7a)

The prophet Jeremiah knew God's presence had much more to do with right action than with location.

Scripture has a lot to say about where God lives. And not all of it is--- surprise!--- consistent.

You have before you a sampling of scripture references. References that point to where God lives. God is everywhere and yet in no one particular place. Scripture also says God lives in particular places, like Bethel, and Shiloh, and Jerusalem. God is present in nature and here on the earth. These images come to us from the Hebrew Bible.

What we see when we turn to the New Testament though, is a turn toward understanding that God lives among us in a new way. In the person of Jesus Christ. The theologian Karl Barth connects God's transcendence, God's otherness, with

God's immanence, God-with-us. These two come together in Jesus.² God is Jesus. Jesus is God.

Even more stunningly in the New Testament we encounter another concept of where God lives. **God lives in us.**

The Holy Spirit renovates us so we may house God. This is the beautiful transformation we just heard read from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. "You are being built into a dwelling of God by his Spirit", and, a little later, "So Christ may dwell in your hearts". We are where God lives.

Jesus Christ sends the Spirit so that we might be renovated, redeemed, made new, into a place suitable for God.

How can we work alongside the master contractor, getting ready for God to move in? Well, for one, we can get rid of some of the old junk that distracts us, ties us down, and keeps us so busy we don't have time for God.

What is that **OLD JUNK** for you? I know what it is for me!

Too much physical stuff to care for; too many distractions; being overscheduled. What about you? Maybe it's a failed relationship that you simply cannot let go of. Maybe it's someone you haven't been able to forgive. Perhaps it's a part of your personality that overshadows everything else. Whatever it is, it is stuff we simply have to clear out if God is going to live in us.

Next we can do some prep work while we are waiting for God to come in and do the renovations God needs to do. The tools of scripture reading, prayer, meditation, and listening will pave the way for the Master contractor. When we are preparing ourselves, silence helps, too, along with a big dose of humility. We can open our eyes to the beauty that is in and all around us, beauty we simply haven't taken the time to notice before.

What **PREP WORK** have you been neglecting?

When we clear out the junk and do the prep work, amazing things happen. We experience God's presence in ways we had not noticed before. We find ourselves more centered, at peace, changed.

Where does God live? In the hearts and imaginations of those who give until they are bankrupt according to BankAmerica. God lives in lives of gentle abandon. God dwells just outside the door of our loneliness and our hunger and our need. God

² Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Volume II, No. 1, pp. vi, 28-31.

is here, in the clouds and on the earth, in the otherness and in the openness. Not in a temple, but in a tent. Not in power, but in poverty. In the one who continues to walk everywhere. The world (and we ourselves) are crowded with God's presence, if we will but open our eyes, clear out the cobwebs, and make room for God.

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2 Samuel 7:1-7

God is everywhere

God is present everywhere (Psalm 139:7-9)

God is here (Gen 28:16)

How dear are your dwelling places! (Ps 84:1)

Who can build a house for him? (2 Chron 2:6)

God lives in particular places

Bethel (Gen 28:17-19) Shiloh (Josh 18:1, Judges 18:31),

Jerusalem (1 Chron 23:25)

The Lord dwells in Zion (Joel 3:17,21)

God lives in tabernacle (Exod 25:8, Josh 22:19)

God is present in nature and here on earth

Will God really dwell on earth? (1 Kings 8:27)

God does not live in houses made by men (Acts 7:48)

God said he would dwell in thick cloud (1 Kings 8:12)

God dwells among the children of Israel (Exod 29:45-6)

God lives in Christ

Something greater than the temple is here (Matt 12:6)

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14)

God lives in us

YOU are being built into a dwelling of God by his Spirit (Eph 2:22)

So Christ may dwell in your hearts (Eph 3:17)

The Spirit of God lives in you (1 Cor 3:16)

Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19)

We are his house (Heb 3:6)