

Season after Pentecost - God's House

October 23, 2016

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD

Readings: Luke: 2 Samuel 7: 1-14

*Lord, May the words I speak be those You want spoken,
may the words we hear be those You want heard. Amen*

It seemed like a good idea at the time. All you have to do is watch fifteen minutes of America's Funniest Videos and you'll know what I mean. People doing wheelies on their riding mower; snowboarding off the roof; putting a lit firecracker in their unsuspecting friends back pockets; leaving a realistic snake or jar of spiders in the refrigerator and asking your Mom to grab the milk for you. Not good. Products like 8-tracks, new coke, touch of yogurt shampoo, ben-gay aspirin, Heinz catsup in different colors, betamax just didn't make it. Apparently someone thought it was a good idea to use the oven door of a stove as a step stool because when I last bought a stove I had to sign a waiver that said I understood the oven door was not a step stool. Many of our goof ups seemed like a good idea at the time. Putting a stool on the chair to reach the light bulb; letting the panicky kitten out of the cage while you're driving. And even some very sound, good-intentioned plans — like bring in a natural predator to control a population of pests — can have unforeseen and disastrous results.

There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with King David's plan to build a house for God. He has been anointed king by God's prophet Samuel. He has united the twelve tribes of Israel and made Jerusalem its capital. He has built a royal palace of Lebanon cedar and led victories over Israel's enemies. David has returned the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem with great fanfare to rest once again in a tent. For reasons we are not told, David takes stock and decides that if he has such a nice palace, shouldn't God have a better residence than a tent? So he proposes to the prophet Nathan that he build God a house and Nathan bows to the king's wishes *until* he has a visit from the Lord that night. God turns down David's plan to build a house for the Lord.

God explains that God has never asked, suggested or commanded any of Israel's leaders to build the Lord a house. The Lord has been moving around among the people in the ark and a tent and that seems just fine to God. It wasn't unusual for victorious kings to build temples to honor their gods. But Israel was to be different from other nations. Perhaps God was reminding David of that while making it very clear to him that his God would not be contained, limited or controlled. The Lord reminds Nathan and David that it is the LORD God who brought the people of Israel out of slavery, who brought David from shepherd to king and who has bought David and Israel victory and peace. It is God who has made it possible for David to be king in a cedar house and the

people Israel to be coming into its own. Was David's idea to build God a house just trying to express gratitude to God or was David trying to pay God back or butter God up for more generosity in the future? Whatever David's motive, the LORD God was clear that God's actions were not transactional but pure, unmerited gift.

God turns around David's idea. "The LORD will make you a house. Instead of David building God a house, the Lord will build a house of David — not a physical residence but a dynasty of successive kings. His son and his descendants will rule over a kingdom God will set aside for the people Israel. Like the promises made at our baptism, God says the LORD will be a father to David's descendent and he shall be like a son to God. While acknowledging the inevitable human sinfulness, God says, "I will not take my steadfast love from him." This will be the promise Israel will cling to even after the kingdom was won, lost, exiled and then under the rule of Rome. Here in today's reading is the root of the expected, rescuing Messiah. When Jesus arrives, his fellow Hebrews are awaiting the day when a descendant of David's royal dynasty will once again come, reign and free them. Though there are hundreds of years since there was a descendant of David on a throne, the faithful look back over their long history to see that the LORD God keeps promises and will not take God's steadfast love away. So they waited and trusted.

There are so very many avenues you can take or lesson you could glean in today's scripture that apply to our own lives. See if any of these speak to your spirit:

- * Include God when making plans. Make following God your plan.
- *Before setting plans in motion, run them by God in prayer and other faithful servants of God and scripture.
- *God will not be confined to a building but insists on being among God's people.

"A few years ago," Barbara Lundblad wrote, " I talked with a friend of mine who's a pastor in New England. "How's your building program going?" I asked. "Oh, we ran out of money before we got to the worship space," she said. I thought to myself, "What could be more important than the worship space?" But I kept my thoughts to myself."

Her friend went on, "We renovated the basement," she said. "You know, we have a shelter there for homeless men. We put in new showers and renovated the old kitchen. The basement was so drab, and the showers-well, there was only one shower and it was lousy. On the Sunday before the shelter opened, the worship service began as usual in the sanctuary. When it came time for communion, the people carried the bread and the cup downstairs to the basement. The whole congregation gathered

around the empty beds. We passed the bread and the cup around the circle. The body of Christ given for you. [The blood of Christ shed for you.] That night the shelter beds were full, and the worship space still needed a lot of work."¹ There's a plan made with God. There's decision that was run passed the Scriptures and the Lord. There is a church whose worship of God goes beyond the sanctuary and who know God's love and presence cannot be captured but only shared.

The house God is interested in building is in our hearts and in a community where God reigns as trusted parent and ruler . . . where God's power, peace and plans are honored, used and followed. That may sound confining to us who cling so tightly to the god of individualism. But the truth is that God's ways are better than ours, no matter what the Eden Adam or Eve in us may say. God's ways are better than ours because they are grounded in the truly unearned, undeserved, unending, unconditional love of God for us. What kind of house will we let God build in us? To what planning do you, do we need to invite God? And perhaps most challenging of all — how do we live fully in the freeing grace of God? What would it mean to really realize in our deeps that God loves us beyond the moon and back? I would like to know, wouldn't you?

Linda Alessandri 10/23/16

ENDNOTES

1. Rev. Dr. Barbara K. Lundblad "When Pentecost Ends Too Soon" May 14, 2005 Day of Pentecost Acts 2: 1-21 as posted on www.day1.net/print.php5?tid=496