EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Nu‘uanu Congregational Church

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*“God in the World”* 2 Samuel 7:1-14a

**At first glance, David’s desire to build God a house is admirable. Here he is, settled into a grand palace of his own. It seems admirable and understandable that he would want to see God in an equally grand situation. It seems pious and a holy ambition. It seems like an act of thanks for all that God has done for him.**

**After all, it was not too long ago that David was a humble shepherd, the youngest of his father’s sons. He was so young and of such little consequence that, at first, he was almost overlooked when Samuel is sent to look for the man God will anoint as the next king.**

**After being in the fields watching over his father’s flocks, David’s fortunes quickly change from one year to the next. First, he is a conquering hero bearing Goliath’s head as his first trophy. Then, he is a member of Saul’s household, playing his harp to sooth Saul’s troubled mind and spirit.**

**Quickly, though, he is back on the field of battle, leading men, winning battles, but then, also fleeing Saul who becomes jealous of David’s success.**

**Finally, all of that drama is behind him and he finds himself in a house of his own. You could say that David was a first-time house owner. As he looks around and sees where God has brought him, suddenly, it seems strange to him that he should have such a grand place while the ark of the covenant is still outside, in a tent.**

**It is in that frame of mind that he is moved to build God a house of God’s own, and as we heard, Nathan—the one person in the land who will always speak the truth to him—Nathan thought so, too…at first…then—that very night—God speaks to Nathan. It seems God has other ideas, other plans for God’s own house and who is going to be the one to build it.**

**So, why not David?**

**God has brought David up from his humble beginnings and has guided and sheltered him from harm every step of the way. God has accomplished many good things through David. Why was David not the one for *this* undertaking, too?**

**In Nathan’s retelling of what he heard the night before, God was very clear that David was *not* the one to build God’s house. It was not because of some slight or crime he had committed. In fact, God was quite detailed regarding what else God means to do for David. Unfortunately, though, we do not have a really clear explanation of why God does not want David to be God’s housebuilder.**

**Perhaps it is because David’s rise has been laden with conflict and battle. Even though most of the conflict David has known, and has performed, has been in the service of building a strong presence in the land for his people, and God’s children. It has been and will continue to be filled with violent conquest.**

**Perhaps God wanted God’s own house to be built in a quieter, more settled and peaceful time; a time when the fortunes of the Israelite people were more stable and secure.**

**Perhaps God sees something more in David’s housebuilding impulse than we are able to see in this passage.**

**As Nathan repeats all that God has said to him the night before, it is helpful to notice how many times God says, “*I*”, “*I*” will do this, and *“I”* will do that—making it sound like David’s plan has come out of some conceit and self-aggrandizement, rather than a genuine desire to honor God. Perhaps what God saw in David’s heart was an inflated sense of who he was, and a diminished understanding of who God is.**

**Perhaps it is yet another way in which God wants to express to David and all of humankind just how precious we are to God, and how reluctant God is to changing God’s place of being from in the midst of the people, to a separate building.**

**This could be God’s way of pointing out how important it is to the heart of God to be so constantly in with God’s people, travelling with them, sharing their hardships on the road, being close to their daily life in all its facets. Perhaps God wanted David, and all who came after him, to consider what it is we do when we assign *one* location and *one* day of the week to go to that location to worship.**

**When I was in seminary, my flat-mates and I, and you may remember that one of my flat mates was Pastor Phyllis Meighan. We worshiped quite often with a small UCC congregation that did not have a pastor, nor a church home of their own. They met wherever they could. One Sunday, we met in a community center. Another Sunday, we met in someone’s living room—we were that small. On still another Sunday, we met in a spare room at a fraternity house on the UC-Berkeley campus. I think there was at least one Sunday when a “place” could not be found, so we met in a park.**

**Before each worship service, whoever was going to lead worship would bring and unpack a large rolling suitcase, you know the kind: the ones that are especially tall and thick. They had a large rolling suitcase, containing all the necessary items for church: a large Bible, a table cross, and a collection plate. On Communion Sunday, the cup and platen were also pulled out of that suitcase, while someone brought in the bread and wine in a paper bag, fresh from a local grocer.**

**After worship, everything was packed back into the suitcase, which was then handed over to the person who was going to lead worship the next Sunday.**

**For me and my friends, it was a novelty, and we enjoyed the small, intimate nature of the gathering. We also liked that the members did not seem to mind being nomads—they actually *liked* the impermanence of their situation. They said it allowed them to be open to being wherever God meant to put them on any given Sunday.**

**Perhaps *that* is what God wanted David to learn—that having a settled place of one’s own can be a good and blessed thing, but before that happens; before the *settled* part of the equation becomes a reality, it is important to realize that being in *one* place was *not* who God had been, nor what God wanted to be to God’s people.**

**Like the beloved people, God had been a traveler, a nomad, even an immigrant. God had known what it was like to be a refugee. We could even say that God knew what it was like to be homeless—or (rather) *houseless*—which is to say: that despite the circumstances, God was not a stranger to the plight of human living**

**God was always with God’s people. God never left them on their own, nor without resources or guidance. God was always in the midst of them—just as God is always in the midst of *us*—and David and all of his descendants needed to grasp this.**

***We* need to grasp this—especially as we dedicate and *re*-dedicate ourselves to being a missional church. The mission that God is sending us on may very well involve coming to a different understanding of how we use our resources—like this beautiful Sanctuary and its grounds.**

**God may even require us to go *off* campus to minister to and with God’s beloved people wherever they are. We may be called out of our comfort zone in a variety of ways as we follow God’s Holy Spirit. This is another way of saying that God is constantly doing a new thing, and we need to be spiritually ready to embrace it and follow.**

**And so, like God, we need to be out in the world. We need to meet God there—out in the world.**

**We need be out in the world with God when we march in support of racial equality and harmony—when we take part in Martin Luther King Day parades, or when we march in protest of unjust or unequal treatment of other people of color being unfairly treated. Or when we stand up with our GLBTQ family and friends, as we explore together what it means to treat each other with respect and forbearance.**

**We will need to meet God out in the world when we advocate for earth friendly solutions to everyday needs and problems.**

**Yesterday, I read an article in *Civil Beat* that said that Hawaii is in the bottom ten states in our level of support for children. So, we need to meet God out in the world where children in need are living, *and* where there are decisions being made about their welfare—in the courts, in the legislature, in counsel meetings, in the local schools—the PSTA and the like.**

**We will meet God in the world—where God apparently *wants to be*—so that we may better care for one another, listen to one another, and educate ourselves about each others’ needs and desires, and the needs of planet we live on.**

**We will meet God in the world and unafraid or hesitant about *being* out in the world—for God’s sake, and for the sake of our neighbors, for our own and our own families’ sake. And by being in the world, we will bless God, we will bless others, we will bless the planet. We will even bless our own lives, and for this all I can say is: Amen—let it be so.**