

August 13, 2017 The Meeting House 2 Samuel 7:1-9

As we pick up the story of David's tenure as King of Israel in 2 Samuel chapter 7, it is important to remember a couple of things. David's armies have been involved in war with the Philistines for some time. However David's forces have taken Jerusalem. David's armies have met the Philistines in the field and have by God's grace decisively defeated them. His kingship of Israel has been established and recognized. Jerusalem has become known as the city of David. A royal palace has been built and David has taken up occupancy. The ark of the covenant, always present with David and his forces when they were in the field has been moved to Jerusalem, and is housed in the Tabernacle, a large tent, dedicated to housing the presence of God. Israel is experiencing the beginning of a season of peace and David is experiencing a season of rest from the constant warfare that has marked his time as King thus far.

And David gets to thinking. A time of peace and a time of rest is also a time to think about things. And typical of David, the thought occurs to him, that it is not right that he as King of Israel should have a palace to live in, while the presence of God resides in a tent...a very nice tent, a very large tent, but nonetheless, a tent. It is almost like David has too much time on his hands. Time to rest has become time to think, and dream and scheme.

So David has this great idea, that if he has a palace to live in, God should have one too. Don't misunderstand me.

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There is something rather noble and certainly faithful about the idea. David is not focussed just on himself. He is not so prideful or full of himself that he thinks, “of course I should have a palace...I am the King. That’s not where David is living. It may even have been a touch of guilt...it is not right that I should live in this beautiful and permanent structure, while the symbol of the presence of God in the community resides in something you would take camping on a trek or a military campaign.

And you have to give David credit. He doesn’t launch a feasibility study. He doesn’t hire an architect or organize a business committee to get the ball rolling. He has not launched a vision of what must be. No orders have been sent or assigned. As a matter of fact he makes an appointment with his spiritual adviser...Nathan the prophet. He asks Nathan, what he thinks of the idea of building a permanent structure...a temple...a large ornate, and rich looking church.

And Nathan’s initial response is very positive. Nathan gets it. David is concerned about making a statement. The statement David wants to make is “I as King am not, and should not be perceived as, more important than the Lord God who has given and blessed my leadership of Israel. That’s why I say there is something noble about the idea. Nathan’s initial response is “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you.” So Nathan sees the desire of David as an act of faith.

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I must tell you, there is a reason I am so sympathetic to David on this. My very first appointment as an ordained minister was to Cochrane and Kapuskasing. Six people attended the church in Cochrane and they had an historic sanctuary built in 1916. A lovely little church. And I would emphasize each of those words. It was lovely. It was little...would seat about a hundred people. And in the community it was recognized as the Presbyterian house of worship. The Kapuskasing church numbered around 25. It had been started 13 years earlier, but had never really developed to the point of being strong enough to launch a building programme. The congregation met in the gymnasium of an elementary school. It had begun in a large finished room in the basement of the manse. It had been moved to the school in hopes of greater visibility in the community.

My official assignment was to shut down the dying congregation in Cochrane and build a church facility in Kapuskasing. Acknowledging my lack of experience in full time ministry I was in no rush. That turned out to be a point of wisdom. The congregation in Cochrane almost immediately began to flourish. By Thanksgiving of my first year we averaging 30 people at worship and shortly into the new year that number became 40. It was pretty clear to me almost immediately, that my "instructions" did not square with the gracious plans of the Lord our God. Knox Cochrane had a new

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lease on life. St. John's in Kapuskasing did grow. And we did build a church during my 3rd year. I have led congregations through 3 building programmes in my years in ministry. And the success of those programmes I am convinced had more to do with discernment of what God was doing, than my personal importance to the schemes.

So what happened with David's emerging dream of building a temple in Jerusalem? Nathan the prophet meant what he said, when he counselled David to proceed with his idea of a grand Temple. But as he slept that very same night, the word of the Lord came to the prophet. And the word of the Lord was fundamentally...not now...and not during the time of David's administration as King of Israel. God is not mad at David...in fact what God does is he makes a promise to David. God says, "I brought you from the role of shepherd to the throne room of this palace. I have been with you. I will make your name great. But you will not build the Temple of Jerusalem."

In fact what God points out to Nathan, and orders him to tell David is, that God's plan is different from David's plan. From the time in which God led the people out of Egypt under the leadership of no less a man than Moses, God has travelled with his people and lived in a tent...I said before it was a nice tent. A big tent. But it was not a permanent structure. And here is the point God makes to his servant

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Nathan, and through Nathan, to His servant David: “Did I ever say to anyone who has led this people, build me a house of cedar?” The obvious answer is no, God did not say do it. And God does not want it to happen at this point, and even under the leadership of his servant, David the King.

There is a reason we need to be mindful of this teaching. Our churches as buildings are facilities. They give us meeting space. This is where church committees meet. Where we share coffee and muffins. Where some of us knit garments that will change the lives of people who have need of assistance. This is where we worship on the weekly anniversary of the resurrection of Jesus. Here the Biblical word is taught and shared. Here the sacraments are part of our faith life. Here we host meetings with various levels of church government, like Presbytery. Here we host joint services with other Christian churches from our community. Here we give space to non church groups to meet because we believe they make a significant contribution to our community’s life. In some eras we have hosted election polls, and facilitated charitable causes that were not just ours and not just for Christians.

The point is....God does not live in a box. Even if it is a nice box. Even if it is a prayerfully dedicated box. Even if it is an officially religious/Christian box. As the word which came to Nathan indicates, God travels with his people wherever they are. And we would be fools to fail to recognize HE chooses, to

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gather with us and bless us here. I shared with you that a “visistor” to one of our services said to me, “Wow...God is in this place.” He has been. Clearly. I prayerfully hope HE will continue to meet with us here. To journey with us as the people of Jesus meeting by the mill pond. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is peace. But. (Big But). God does not dwell with us here as we wish. Or when we wish. Or because we provide a really nice house and permit HIM to enter and stay.

God chooses to be with us because we are believers, chosen by HIM to serve HIS holy purposes. If we do not prioritize HIS purposes and HIS will for us, we may well find ourselves alone. The sovereignty of God means we are blessed that HE meets with us in Jesus name. And the sovereignty of God means HE chooses to meet with us in Jesus name. He never said, “Build ME a house of cedar.” Let us pray.

Lord revealed in Christ, and present in YOUR Holy Spirit, we thank you for saving grace, and the degree of faith you have led us to enjoy. We praise YOU that meeting in YOUR name, in a house known to reverence YOUR name, we may experience your being in the midst of us. Lord help us to remember that we do not control YOU or hold the upper hand in this relationship of faith. Grant that we may serve YOU. Grant that we may be servants YOU can send to others, to be a blessing to

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others. May we hold high the cross of Christ in this corner of the world. In Jesus name we pray. Amen