

Where God Lives

Texts: **2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16; Romans 16: 25-27; Luke 1: 26-38**

In July of 2014 my parents moved out of their house and into a condo. It was a momentous move for them and it was a little hard for me, too. That was the house that I was brought home to as an infant, riding in my Nana's arms because I was too precious for her to allow one of my incompetent parents to hold me. That was the house where I first climbed a tree .. and where I first fell out of a tree. I still have a scar on my leg from where a branch caught me. That was the house where my growth was measured on the wall year after year ... until they put an addition on the house, and tore down the wall! That was the house where all the neighborhood kids came to play, so much so that one night, a neighbor called up looking for her son, Paul. My mom said, "Sorry, Paul's not here," and the neighbor said, "Well where is he then?" You see, Paul practically lived with us. And that was the house I always came home to. Off to college, back to the house. Off to seminary, back to the house. Off to grad school, back to the house. Off to live with my new wife in the United States, back to the house, at least for holidays. For more than 50 years, that house was where the action happened, and it was a permanent place no matter how transient I was. But six years ago they sold it, and moved to a new place, which will never be a home for me, though it housed my parents.

My experience was one of settled constancy. And it was the very opposite of the experience of Israel in the wilderness! They had always been on the move. They never stayed more than a few months in the same place, if that. They travelled around in the wilderness, for 40 years, then were on the move into the Promised Land, but always fighting, always trying to get themselves established. And they had finally done it with King David, and he had built himself a nice palace to say to the world, here we are, and here we stay. But there was a bit of a problem. It didn't look that great for David to have a palace for himself while the ark of the covenant was still in a tent, with no permanent place to rest.

For those of you who don't remember the movie, *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and why would you, because it came out 39 years ago, the ark of the covenant was a chest where the original tablets of the Ten Commandments were kept. The ark had moved about the wilderness with the Israelites, and it had represented the presence of God with them. It was the

place where they could go to meet God, a kind of reminder of the great meeting they had had with God at Mount Sinai when God had given them the Ten Commandments in the first place. They thought of it as the place where God dwelt, and it didn't look that good that the king had built himself a palace before the ark even got out of its pup tent. But more than that, King David wanted to have a permanent place for the ark of God right next to his palace to symbolize that his power is right next to God's power, and to show the people and his enemies that he is neighbors with God and not to be messed with. David wants to have a monopoly on the presence of God; he wants to pin God down right next to him. So he says to Nathan the prophet, "Hey, look, I'm living in my cedar palace, and the ark of God is still staying at a motel. Let's build a house for the ark, and for God, right here next to my palace." It sounds faithful and selfless, even though David had ulterior motives.

Now I'm not sure if you noticed what happened next. Nathan the prophet does what so many advisors do when the boss says, "Hey, I have a plan. Whaddaya think?" He just spitballs. He makes it up off the top of his head, and he says, "Yes, boss, that's a great idea. God is with you!" But he's just blowing smoke here! He's not authorized to say that. He didn't check with God before answering. He just said, "Sounds great. Go for it! God's gonna love it!" But God doesn't love it. God comes to Nathan that night and gives him a different message for David: "Go and tell my servant David, this is what God really thinks about your idea: A house? Who said anything about a house? I haven't lived in a house since I brought the people up out of Egypt. I've been living on the go in the tent and the tabernacle for ages. I don't need a house. Did I ever mention a house to anybody? Anybody? Did I ever tell any of the tribal rulers, 'Gee it would be nice if you built me a nice house of cedar?' No, I didn't. So let's not hear anything more about a house, please. I was the one who took you from shepherding sheep. I was the one who turned you from a puny little shepherd boy into a king. I was the one who went with you wherever you went and I did it without a house. I was the one who brought you to victory, and I didn't need any cedar paneling to do it. So no more talk about building me a house. If I wanted a house, I'd already have a house. So, no, you're not going to make me a house. But I'm going to make *you* a house. Not a house of cedar, but a house of descendants who will rule forever. A royal house, not like the puny cedar house you have built for yourself. Build *me* a house? I'll build *you* a house!"

So that was the end of David's plan to monopolize God all to himself. Not gonna happen. But it was also the beginning of the promise that King David would always have a descendent who would rule. God took a long time to fulfill that promise, and it looked pretty sketchy for a lot of that time, what with the defeats at the hands of the Assyrians and the Babylonians and then the exile and all, and then more defeats at the hands of the Greeks and the Romans and all of

their Israel stomping, and the placement of the phony King Herod on the throne. But when Jesus was born, of the house of King David, in his royal lineage, God made the divine promise to David come true. For all eternity a descendent of David will rule because now the risen Jesus rules, the one anointed in David's line, the Messiah.

And that's why it doesn't matter that Israel has no earthly king now, no descendent of David on the throne. God's promise is intact because of the rule of the risen Jesus. That's what Luke is trying to tell us in the message that the angel Gabriel gave to Mary. Jesus is the descendant of the House of David who will be the king on the throne forever. But more than that, God's rejection of a house from David is a sign of God's love to all of us. God will not be confined in a tiny house where only a few can have access to God. God will not be limited by a time and a place. The sign of God's presence, the tent with the ark of the covenant, moves from place to place to show that God is always on the move, to show that God goes everywhere, to show that God doesn't belong to any one person or people. God stays in the tent. Now later, of course, Solomon built a temple for the Lord, but that always seems like a concession of God to human weakness, rather than something that God needs or even really wants. God certainly doesn't go out of the way to keep the temple from being burnt to the ground and destroyed. The Babylonians do it, and then the Romans do it. And God doesn't seem to care, not enough to stop them, anyway. Not only that, but the tent and the ark and the tablets were all lost along with the Temple where they were eventually housed. It seems that God was getting rid of anything that would even be a sign of God's presence among them.

But here's where it gets interesting. The Gospel of John tells us at the very beginning that the Word of God took on flesh and dwelt among us, and in Greek it literally says that the Word *tented* among us. What John seems to be trying to say, is that with the birth of Jesus, the tent with the Lord is back, the tent that has the terms of the covenant in it. Only this time, the covenant is not written on stone tablets, but it's in the very person of Jesus, in the very presence of God with us. The tent contains a new covenant to make the first covenant complete. This time, God is dwelling with all humanity by becoming human. The tent is human flesh. The presence of God is the presence of a person. With the human life of Jesus we have the experience of God living in our midst, of God being with us.

And the risen Jesus does even more. He promises us the gift of the Holy Spirit who will dwell with us. It's the Spirit who makes the presence of God real among God's people even today. It's the Spirit of God who dwells with us. And God's Spirit in us means that, in a very real sense, we become one of the dwelling places of God. God doesn't need a house to be built with human hands, because God has built a home for Godself in every person. Paul says over

and over again in his letters to the Corinthians, “Don’t you know that you are a temple of the living God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?” Paul says the same thing in Ephesians: “You are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by the Spirit.”

God doesn’t need David to build God a house because God’s plan is to dwell, first and foremost with us in Jesus, when God took on human flesh, and then in a secondary way, with each of us through the power of the Holy Spirit. God won’t be confined to one place, to one person or to one nation like Israel. And God makes this plain again, in the bread and wine of the sacrament, indwelling in the elements to be present to all God’s people through the Spirit.

God doesn’t need anyone to build a place for God to live, because through Jesus Christ God lives in each of us. This is the good news of the gospel, the life and love of God dwelling with God’s people forever. God has made a home with us, one that will never be sold, and will last forever. Thanks be to God!

Amen