

2 Samuel 7:1-14a

New Revised Standard Version

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; 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: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived 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 and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.

I went to ballet classes while I was growing up. My favorite part of ballet class was the recital outfit because they were special and beautiful. So, when I had a daughter I enrolled her in ballet class. I didn't ask her if she wanted to do it, I had already made the decision for her. I had done it, I had enjoyed it, she was my kid, so she would do it and she would enjoy it. However, she did not enjoy ballet. I had made up my mind, but I had not asked the person who was going to be doing the ballet if they wanted to do it. Sometimes that happens to us, with our bosses or our teachers, a decision is made that affects us but no one asks us beforehand for our opinion.

That's what is happening here in our story. King David has moved to the city of Jerusalem. He brought the ark of the Lord to put God at the center of the city. He built himself a palace because that's what kings are good for.¹ David gets it in his head that he is going to build God a house. At first, the prophet Nathan says, "Great! Do everything you have in mind, God is with you." But, then God shows up to Nathan reminding him that he is a prophet and he is supposed to ask God first. Nathan isn't supposed to assume he knows what God thinks.

Years ago I had a conversation with someone that has stuck with me. It was a conversation about who was going to go to heaven. The person I was talking with had a definite idea about who were God's chosen, and I just kept saying, "I think God is bigger than that." I think that God is bigger than that. God is bigger than our pre-set ideas. God's love is so much more expansive and inclusive than we can even imagine. You hear about pastors and churches who say that they understand how God works, they know who God loves and who God forgives. But no matter how great we think God is, God's love is always greater. I see God as magnificent mystery. Paul Young, author of the book *The Shack* said, "When you accept the beauty of God's mystery, you don't have to be right all the time. You don't have to have all the answers. You can love a good question, and know that God can be found in good questions."

Nathan had to sheepishly go back to David and tell him that God doesn't want David to build God a house. We don't know why, though elsewhere in the Bible it says that David's hands are full of blood. Nathan does tell David that God will build David a dynasty. This is the first

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/793-8th-sunday-after-pentecost-ord-16b-july-18-2021>

passage that Christians look back to and say this the first promise of the Messiah that comes in Jesus. Jesus' lineage is traced back to David in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke. God says God will establish the kingdom of David's descendent and that descendent shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever, Christians say that is pointing to Jesus. Did you hear the last line of the scripture we read, "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me." It reminds me of the Lord's Prayer where Jesus calls God "Our Father, in heaven." This passage is seen as key in understanding David's legacy and importance.

In this scripture passage, there is one Hebrew word that is defined four different ways. The word is *beit* (בַּיִת) and means house. It is defined here as house, and temple (a house for God), and dynasty as in the House of Windsor with Queen Elizabeth in England or here referring to the House of David.

This passage is the fourth great covenant. Covenant is a word you usually only hear in church. We have lots of words like that, that you only hear in church. Instead of a foyer we call it a narthex. Instead of a stage we call it an altar. Instead of an audience, you are the congregation. When we dip the bread into the juice at communion we call that intinction. We sing the doxology after the offering. Doxology means a song to praise God.

Covenant is sort of like the church word for contract because both are an agreement between two or more persons to do or not do a specified thing. But, a covenant is not enforceable by law. A covenant is powerful, it is not made casually. The covenant we are familiar with is the marriage covenant. Two people decide that they will, for the rest of their lives if at all possible, live out promises they make to each other. There are also covenants of life-long friendship, covenants made on the battlefield, or in the hospital room. A covenant is a promise and it is a promise that the covenant-maker will go to the ends of the earth to fulfill.

In the Bible the first covenant is with God and Noah with the rainbow as a sign of God's promise to never again flood the earth. Then there is the covenant with God and Abraham with circumcision as a sign of God's promise to look after the Israelites people, to bless them, and from Abraham there would come a great nation. God and Moses have a covenant with the promised land as a sign of God's promise to look after the Hebrew people and protect them if they followed the Ten Commandments. This fourth great covenant is a promise to David that he would have an eternal dynasty.

David's son Solomon does build God a house, a temple. I remember visiting another church for the baptism of a friend's baby. As I walked up to the sanctuary, one of the ushers was outside of the church and he said to me, "Get in God's house." This is God's house right here. Church buildings are important because they enable us as a church family to live out our mission and calling. We are then called to heal and teach outside of these walls as much as we are within them.

This building is not our identity as a church family, just as the house we sleep in or the building we work in is not our identity as human beings. But, this building, our house, our school, and our workplace is where we share God's already present love and grace. This church is never quiet. We work hard to make a positive impact in this community welcoming all people, from preschoolers to youth to Narcotics Anonymous folks. I can't wait to see who will come next to be a part of this dynamic place.

God tells Nathan to tell David, "I have been with you wherever you went." God is not tied to a particular space, but God's presence is with us wherever we go. God promises to be with us always, offering freedom from hatred, anxiety, fear, and pain. God is our shepherd, we lack nothing. God gives us rest in green meadows, and leads us beside restful waters. God guides

us in proper paths for the sake of God's good name. Even though we walk in the darkest valley, we will fear no danger because God is at our side with rod and staff to give us courage. God spreads the table before us in the sight of our enemies and richly bathes our head with oil. Our cup overflows, so full it spills over. Goodness and love unfailing will follow us all the days of our lives and we will live in the house of our God as long as we live. Thanks be to God, Amen.