

August 22, 2021
Rev. Kerry Smith

1 Kings 8: 22-30, 41-43 (Un)likely Leadership - Solomon
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

1 Kings 8: 22-30, 41-43

New Revised Standard Version

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. He said, "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. Therefore, O Lord, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, 'There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.' Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David.

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O Lord my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive.

"Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name—for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm—when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.

What makes a place holy for you? It might be a summer camp that you went to in your younger years that was a place of love and friendship. It might be the place in your apartment where you go to sit and read and pray. It might be the table where you do puzzles and sit in quiet. It might be the kitchen sink where you wash dishes while you pray. It might be the Trinity River Audubon where you see birds and watch sunrises. It might be on your bike where you ride and feel the wind on your face reminding you that the Holy Spirit is with you. What makes a place holy for you?

For many people, their church sanctuary is holy. I think about all of the people that have worshipped in this place since Greenland Hills' first worship service in this same sanctuary on October 27, 1946. That is a lot of hymns sung, a lot of sermons that have been preached, and a lot of kids that have run through these hallways. I love to come to this sanctuary during the week when the lights are off, and there is no one else here. I listen and pray and wonder about how many people have prayed in this place. I wonder what they prayed for and if everything turned out okay. During the pandemic, we weren't able to come to this place and it was so hard. We discovered new places where God lived like around the kitchen table.

We started worshipping outside under the Greenland Hills trees last September and it was so much fun. The breeze would be blowing, the birds would be chirping, and it was really special. We baptized babies, we shared communion, and we sang songs together. I really enjoyed it and it helped me to see that we could worship God right outside of our temple.

This summer we have been learning about the earliest leaders of Israel – Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon. In our scripture today Solomon has built the temple. Now they are bringing the ark from the tabernacle into the temple. The ark of the covenant is the symbol of God's promises. Inside the ark are two tablets of stone with the law written on them. The Ten Commandments were a constant reminder that God would not leave God's people. God promised God's presence.

One of the things that makes a place holy for me is a candle. I light a candle when I pray just like we light candles in our worship to remind us that God is here with us. One of my favorite worship services is on Good Friday when we read the story of Jesus' death. Here at Greenland Hills we do a Tenebrae service. The word Tenebrae comes from the Latin meaning darkness. It is a service based on a twelfth-century worship service. I think that is so cool, that we are doing something people have been doing for 900 years. We start the service saying, "God is light, in whom there is no darkness at all. Jesus Christ is the light of the world. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and we loved darkness rather than light. We have all of these candles on the altar and after someone reads part of the story, they blow out one of the candles. At the end, we read that Jesus has died and the last reader blows out the last candle. We sit in darkness. As we leave we know that we will come back in two days on Easter morning as we make that journey from darkness to light.

In our scripture today we heard part of Solomon's prayer. It is a complicated theological prayer. Solomon says to God, we know you don't live in a house. We know that all of heaven can't contain you. And yet, here you are, readily available. That is the mystery. God is so big that the entire universe cannot contain God and God is so small that God can live in your heart. We can feel God in this place and also with us when we leave this place. That is the mystery of God.¹

God loved the people, God was with the people, would they love God? Solomon reminds us that God is everywhere and we can pray and worship God anywhere, but the sanctuary is a place set aside for worshipping God. Solomon prays that people can come to the temple to be in communion with God. He insists that all people, even foreigners, are to be welcome in God's temple. Solomon prays that people know God who is available and in the presence of the people as they worship in community. We come together for worship every Sunday for worship to center our communities and our individual lives in God. Within us there is a desire to seek, to know, to experience, and to please God. I experience God with all of you.

I love coming to this place because it helps me to feel connected. This is a place for all where we find comfort and God's presence. There are hidden gifts in everything. One of the gifts that I received during our time of sheltering in place last year was the gift of being in one place, my house. There were no errands to run and no places that we had to be.

During the pandemic we may not have been able to worship together in this sanctuary, but I loved worshipping online with you because we were commenting on Facebook and sharing our prayers. After this pandemic and time of isolation, I for one, forget how to interact with people. The other day I was listening to the Everything Happens podcast with Kate Bowler interviewing US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy about the loneliness epidemic. Dr. Murthy said we are all struggling to connect more deeply with each another. He said, "The very things that afford us the greatest opportunity to connect we are afraid to share. Exactly when we need to open ourselves up and connect more deeply with others, we pull back and shut ourselves off because we are scared."² We are afraid to say that we are lonely, that we feel alone, but we are each other's solution. Loneliness is the reason to reach out. Faith requires vulnerability. Too often we are unwilling to be vulnerable.³ We are each other other's solution.

Just in case you haven't heard it today, you matter. You have worth and value and people in this place want to connect with you. I find my self-worth in knowing that I was created to give

¹ Sermon brainwave podcast. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wPK4ILxxRA>

² <https://katebowler.com/podcasts/vivek-murthy-the-loneliness-epidemic/>

³ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CSu79HyHIRi/>

and receive love. You also were created to give and receive love. The connections in our life help to bring life and meaning. In this church, may we love one another well.

Do you remember the song we sing as children? “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong; they are weak, but he is strong. Yes, Jesus love me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.” Maybe that’s the point of it all, for us to know in our hearts and souls that God loves each and every one of us. Thanks be to God, Amen.