

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

2 Samuel 7:1-14a

^{7:1} Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ² 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." ³ Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you." ⁴ But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵ Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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?" ⁸ 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; ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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, ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ^{14a} I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.

Commentary

David showed a noble sensitivity at the outset of God's honor. He found it inappropriate that he should dwell in a magnificent palace, while God's ark—the symbol of God's presence—remained in a tent, as it had since the ark was built. David determined, therefore, to build a temple more suited to God's magnificence; and Nathan the prophet originally gave his consent. God conceded, however, that David's son—not David himself—would be permitted to build a temple for God. A highlight of this story is that God legitimizes not only David's rule but the rule of his descendents. A central element to this oracle was YHWH's oath not to take back his faithfulness from David's house and not to reject it as the ruling line in Judah. God would

punish the rulers for wrongdoing, but would not cut off or reject them. Jesus' own Davidic lineage became important to early Christian thinking about his messiahship.

Reflection

"It was God's pleasure to dwell in a tent, since God was a God of movement." What did the tent represent that might be lost in a temple? What warning might this speak to Christians who have heavily institutionalized their religion? Does building a magnificent church bring honor to God? The word *house* meant both a building and a household. What do we associate with the word *house* today? What was God's purpose in making a covenant with the house of David?

Ephesians 2:11-22

^{2:11} So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision" --a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands--¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵ He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷ So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Commentary

Pious Jews regarded their separation from Gentile nations as the appropriate, God-ordained response to God's selection of Israel to be God's special possession. Refusal to blend in with the Gentiles was an expression of loyalty and gratitude to God. The Pauline mission emphasized the end of this separation. Just as God was one, humanity must become one again under the one God. Two dimensions of reconciliation are affected by Jesus. Both Jew and Gentile were alienated from God, and both were alienated from each other. The alienation that had kept them apart by prescribing separation was now abolished, since the promise toward which it had pointed had now come in Jesus. The author's language distances hearers from their pagan past and helps Christians claim a new identity. It helps them respond wholly to God's call for repentance and a change of heart, rooting out the old ways and valuing new ways of relating and valuing in Christ.

Reflection

The church is called to model a unity in Christ that is God's plan for all things in heaven and earth. How does our church reflect this unity? What can we do to break down "walls of hostility?" What did it mean for Gentile Christians to overcome their barriers of resentment against Jewish Christianity?

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

^{6:30} The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. ⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴ When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵ and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Commentary

Last week's readings on John the Baptist were an aside to the main story of Jesus sending out the disciples. When they returned, Jesus greeted them with an invitation to a well-deserved rest, a retreat in the wilderness. Rest, however, was to elude the disciples: crowds had already gathered, raced to their retreat spot ahead of them, and were waiting on their arrival. Jesus' response was exemplary. He did not see people who were interfering with his plans for a retreat with his disciples, nor did he send them away out of an interest in protecting his personal time with the disciples. Instead, he saw them as people who were hungry for healing and teaching about God: "sheep without a shepherd." The image of the shepherdless sheep reverberates powerfully in the Old Testament texts. Language about Jesus as a shepherd stems from the early church's conviction that He was the "Son of David" in whom God's faithfulness to his oath to David, and also his oath to Israel, was fulfilled. The disciples did enjoy rest with the crowds as they all broke bread together on the Galilean hillside. It was a rest shared by all, ever so much richer than the disciples would have known alone.

Reflection

How do you look at the people around you? Are they sometimes an annoyance or interruption, or can you see them with Jesus' eyes as hungry and hurting and needing compassion and healing? Where do you see signs of people looking for healing and teaching about the spiritual dimension of life? What have you done to lead them in a way of wholeness in Christ?

- ²⁰ I have found my servant David;
with my holy oil I have anointed him;
- ²¹ **my hand shall always remain with him;
my arm also shall strengthen him.**
- ²² The enemy shall not outwit him,
the wicked shall not humble him.
- ²³ **I will crush his foes before him
and strike down those who hate him.**
- ²⁴ My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him;
and in my name his horn shall be exalted.
- ²⁵ **I will set his hand on the sea
and his right hand on the rivers.**
- ²⁶ He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'
- ²⁷ **I will make him the firstborn,
the highest of the kings of the earth.**
- ²⁸ Forever I will keep my steadfast love for him,
and my covenant with him will stand firm.
- ²⁹ **I will establish his line forever,
and his throne as long as the heavens endure.**
- ³⁰ If his children forsake my law
and do not walk according to my ordinances,
- ³¹ **if they violate my statutes
and do not keep my commandments,**
- ³² then I will punish their transgression with the rod
and their iniquity with scourges;
- ³³ **but I will not remove from him my steadfast love,
or be false to my faithfulness.**
- ³⁴ I will not violate my covenant,
or alter the word that went forth from my lips.
- ³⁵ **Once and for all I have sworn by my holiness;
I will not lie to David.**
- ³⁶ His line shall continue forever,
and his throne endure before me like the sun.
- ³⁷ **It shall be established forever like the moon,
an enduring witness in the skies." Selah**

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.