

2 Samuel 7:1-14a

7 After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²he said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.”

³Nathan replied to the king, “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you.”

⁴But that night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying:

⁵“Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? ⁶I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. ⁷Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”’”

⁸“Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. ⁹I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. ¹⁰And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning ¹¹and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: ¹²When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴I will be his father, and he will be my son.

Psalm 89:20-37

²⁰I have found David my servant;
with my sacred oil I have anointed him.

²¹My hand will sustain him;
surely my arm will strengthen him.

²²The enemy will not get the better of him;
the wicked will not oppress him.

²³I will crush his foes before him
and strike down his adversaries.

²⁴My faithful love will be with him,
and through my name his horn will be exalted.

²⁵I will set his hand over the sea,

his right hand over the rivers.
26 He will call out to me, ‘You are my Father,
my God, the Rock my Savior.’
27 And I will appoint him to be my firstborn,
the most exalted of the kings of the earth.
28 I will maintain my love to him forever,
and my covenant with him will never fail.
29 I will establish his line forever,
his throne as long as the heavens endure.
30 “If his sons forsake my law
and do not follow my statutes,
31 if they violate my decrees
and fail to keep my commands,
32 I will punish their sin with the rod,
their iniquity with flogging;
33 but I will not take my love from him,
nor will I ever betray my faithfulness.
34 I will not violate my covenant
or alter what my lips have uttered.
35 Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—
and I will not lie to David—
36 that his line will continue forever
and his throne endure before me like the sun;
37 it will be established forever like the moon,
the faithful witness in the sky.”

Selah

Bloody Histories but a Faithful God

Good morning. It’s good to be with you all today. For those who don’t know me, I’m Julia Page, and I grew up going to this church. Long ago, I would sometimes play the cello for these summer services. Now I’d like to thank Judy and Will for the opportunity to speak with you all today. May God be present with each of us.

Our scripture reading for today comes from the book of 2 Samuel. David has just had the ark of the covenant brought up to Jerusalem, rejoicing and dancing as it arrives. He has settled in his palace, and verse 1 says that the Lord has given him rest from all his enemies. Though today’s passage comes before the story of David violating Bathsheba and subsequently murdering her husband Uriah in the text of 2 Samuel, it is believed that the chapter we’re reading today comes after those events chronologically, towards the end of David’s reign. David has a time of rest, and he now wants to do something for God. Knowing that God is much higher and

more powerful than him, he feels that the ark of God should not be housed in a tent, while he lives in a fancy palace made of cedar. And common sense says this is a good idea, a way to please and honor God, and David's prophet Nathan initially supports it. But then Nathan receives a word from the Lord telling him that David should not build the temple. So why is that?

God asks of David, "are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?" While we don't get much explanation here in 2 Samuel of what God means, David explains this more fully to his son Solomon, who ultimately will build the temple, when the same events are recounted in 1 Chronicles. He says, "My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the Lord my God. But this word of the Lord came to me: 'You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight.'" God goes on to explain that David's son, "a man of peace and rest," will build the temple.

Remember, at this point, David has war blood on his hands, as well as having committed a grave sin against Bathsheba and Uriah. But God has not abandoned him. God continues to bless him. In our reading today, God promises to make David's name great, to give him a homeland for his people and rest from their enemies, and offspring who will be raised up to form an everlasting kingship. But David is not to build the temple. He has shed too much blood – in this, we see that the shedding of blood has consequences. Because of his history, David is not the right person to build the temple. His role, instead, is to be a ruler and king. Even as God forgives and blesses David, this forgiveness does not remove the consequences of sin. Our personal and corporate sins across history continue to affect us in racism, discrimination, and ongoing spilling of blood. This blood then cries out. In Genesis, when Cain kills Abel, the Lord says to him, "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." Here too, God says to David that he has shed blood "in my sight." When the world seems not to care about loss or injustice, God sees it. Even though much of the blood on David's hands seems to be justified as necessary for the people of Israel to defeat their enemies, the loss of life is still mournful and tainting. Like David, we are sinful people, but God offers us an unending wealth of mercy and grace. Even as we accept this grace, we, too, must remember the blood for which our collective histories make us responsible.

Now the second reason that David is not to build a temple for the Lord is that God never asked him for one. God reminds David that he has been dwelling in a tent since the Exodus from

Egypt, and he asks David, “Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’”

We see here in God’s response that even if something is a good task, that doesn’t necessarily mean that God wants us to do it. Building the temple is a good thing, and it’s not even that David’s desire to do it is warped or self-serving. It simply is not the task that God desires for him. Instead, it is for his son Solomon to build. How often are we more fixated on it being us doing the good task than on the goodness of the task itself? I’m currently a PhD student, working in a biology lab. In academia, there’s a lot of pressure to publish, to have one’s name on novel and impactful work. Sometimes in that environment, it’s easy to lose track of the joy and purpose of the work itself and the wonder of learning. Am I as happy about my collaborators’ discoveries as my own? David, however, does not respond with frustration when told he should not build the temple, but happily cedes the task to Solomon. Admittedly, he was just promised a great name, among other things. But in any case, he contributes to the task as is fitting for him – in 1 Chronicles we see that he does make preparations for the temple’s building, including providing lots of building materials and resources – but he does not receive the glory of having built the temple. Can we, too, celebrate good endeavors as much when someone else does them as when we do them ourselves? I pray that we may celebrate all good work to the glory of God. We should also seek to elevate those who are often overlooked – David, after all, was a shepherd boy before God chose to make his name great.

Now if there are good tasks that we shouldn’t do because they’re not what God has ordained for us, how do we decide what to do? Does it not make sense that it would be ideal for the good to come as quickly as possible? If David could build the temple, why wait for Solomon? I don’t have the answers, but, since I’m writing this sermon, I’ll share a few thoughts.

In general, I’m someone who believes that we sometimes spend too much time looking for our particular calling, waiting for some kind of sign, when there are multiple options that all fall within God’s will for our lives. But clearly, here, there is a good task, one that is right for Solomon, but which would be sin for David because it would be disobedience to God. So what do we do? How do we decide what tasks are for us?

First, it is clear that we should be in communication with God. While we might not hear a direct word from God like Nathan does in this passage, if we are in communication with Him

through consistent prayer, we put our plans before Him and open ourselves to His voice. Next, we should seek and be responsive to wise counsel. God does not give His word directly to David, despite it being about David's plans; He gives it to Nathan. David, in turn, listens to and trusts Nathan, even when his counsel changes. So let's find wise friends. Let's pray consistently, think carefully, talk to others and be open to their counsel, and then act, making decisions and trusting God to be with us. And we should be particularly thoughtful when these decisions are as impactful as building a temple to the Lord, which would house the ark of the covenant and be a centerpiece of religious and community life for the people of Israel. We should keep in mind that not all good tasks are ours to do.

Furthermore, even as we work for God's kingdom, we must remember that God has already accomplished the most important work for us. In God's response to David, we are reminded that God is sufficient. He doesn't need a house. While David wants to offer something to God, it is ultimately God who promises and provides his people a home, not the other way around. In our passage, God reminds David of what He has already done for him. He says, "I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you." David went from being a shepherd boy tending his family's flocks to being the great king over Israel with victory over the surrounding nations. God here reminds him that that was all God's doing, and not by David's own strength. Similarly, through the cross, Jesus has already accomplished what we could not, despite striving all our lives. We cannot earn our own salvation, and God doesn't need us, but he allows us to participate in his work nonetheless.

After God reminds David of what he has done for him, he then gives David promises about the future. Among other things, He says, "I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son." Though David will not build the temple, his son will. And his line will continue forever. This prophecy is fulfilled not only in Solomon, but ultimately in Jesus, who descends from David's line and whose kingdom will be established eternally.

We, too, can stop to first look at the past and remember what God has done, both in our own lives and throughout history. The stories of scripture are our stories. In Romans, Paul writes, "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does

not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

If we have been adopted into God’s family, though we might not be Jews, we inherit the history of his people. This includes the bloodshed and the sin. But we also inherit God’s promises to his people. Sometimes I think we get confused about what those promises are. Sometimes Christian women of my age will make comments to other single women like, “Your future husband’s out there. You just have to wait for God to bring him to you.” When I’d hear this, I’d often think, well if I’m going to get married, then yes, that’s true. Cause I’m not marrying someone more than two decades younger than me. But God never promised marriage, at least not to me. To some people He may make specific promises, but He never promised me a particular job, or children, or good health. He never promised we would be free from pain or hardship; in fact, he said we will suffer in this world. But he did promise to be faithful. In Psalm 89, God says of David, “I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure. “If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky.” Whatever David and his sons might do, God will be faithful. He is trustworthy and true to his word. It may not always feel like it; the psalmist actually goes on to say he feels rejected and spurned, that God has broken his covenant. But with our broader vantage point, we can see that God was faithful, even as the consequences of David’s sin continued to play out in devastating events with his children towards the end of his reign. After the part of psalm 89 that we read, there is a word – *Selah* – before the psalmist continues. The meaning of the word *Selah* is somewhat unknown, but it was likely a musical indication indicating a rest, a pause, a point at which to stop, that was included to emphasize what came right before. So may we hear these promises, which have been

established like the moon, which stands as a witness in the night sky, and stop – to look back and remember our histories, including the blood, and then look ahead with the knowledge of God’s promises. And he has promised us a king in the line of David who will reign forever, one whose blood can wash away all the rest.

Thank you.