

## From the Pulpit of Trinitarian Congregational Church...

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House of Refuge

2 Samuel 7:1-14

Rev. Julie G. Olmsted

David was having a moment. Rolling his life around in his mind, thinking about his blessings, letting his thoughts just kind “air out,” he thinks to himself that maybe God would like a house of cedar, maybe one like the one he has. God has been so good, after all. David has become king, he has conquered the Philistines, he enjoys safety for the moment. Ah... what a good idea! Maybe God would be comfortable, as I am.

This is a pivotal moment. First of all, notice the similarities between this passage and a couple of others. When David steps up to fight the gigantic Goliath back in 1 Samuel, everyone has doubts. But David insists that he can do it, no problem. He represents himself well; he convinces Saul (king at that time) that he would be wise to let him at the giant. Saul relents and then loads David up with heavy armor, so much so that he can't move. David protests saying, “I can't even move in this stuff.” Of course he takes it off and...you know the rest of the story. David kills the giant with five stones and a slingshot (on the first shot).

David knew who he was then. He couldn't be contained in heavy armor. He needed to be free, to move, to dance and to flex his young muscles.

God, in his response to David in our scripture today, is saying something similar. God has got to be free, God seems to be saying. God needs to be out of the box, able to move, to dance and to flex his muscles. (Where are we wearing heavy armor? Where do we need to be free?) God needs to be out there, with the people. So much for David's musings about building God a house. God uses (of all things) a pun to respond to David's good idea.

“You'll build me a house? Oh, no. I'll build you a house. And it won't be of cedar. It won't be of stone or wood. It will be much stronger and last much longer than anything you could build. It will be of invisible building material. It will be a covenant. A binding of all your people, those living now, and those for generations to come. A House of God, in which, if you choose, you will live forever. A covenant is much stronger than any building. A promise (bound by the love and faithfulness of

God) is more powerful than anything on earth, more powerful than anything you and I can come up with. There's a great tension of sternness and authority, love and faithfulness that characterizes this communication. God seems to be saying, "Don't you worry about me. I got this thing (always have, always will). Now just listen to what I have in store for you." Where are we trying to tell God what to do? Where in our lives do we think we know better than God?

This story also calls to mind the passage of Jesus, along with Peter, James and John on top of the mountain, when Elijah and Moses appear. This is the story of the transfiguration. Remember when Peter wanted to build three tabernacles? "One for you, Lord, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." And Jesus says, "Come on, Peter...we got work to do."

A building is not what God needs. People are what God needs. People willing to love God's people, all of God's people. Not just those like us. Not just those we get along with. Not the ones we like to hang out with and laugh with and be seen with. All people.

This beautiful building, our church, is for us. But it is not where God is, necessarily. Where is God? God is everywhere. God is out in the streets, in the beauty of God's earth, in the eyes of a child, in the touch of comfort from one human to another. God is right in here, in the heart, right in here, in the mind. God can't be boxed. The house of the Lord is a great refuge. But it isn't necessarily found here in the building. It's found wherever you are, and wherever you recognize God's presence. God is found in the here and now, hiding in plain sight. Practicing the presence of God is our task, our charge, and our discipline as dwellers of God's House.

I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever and ever, it says in the 23rd Psalm. That isn't camping out in church. That isn't even going to church every time the doors open (although that is a very good idea). "I will dwell in the House of the Lord" is an affirmation of the covenant God made with David all those many centuries ago. It's a covenant made by Jesus as he celebrated Passover for the last time with the disciples. It's a covenant that (hallelujah) includes you and me, and everyone that will come after us. It's an ancient promise only to be found in the present moment.

And the spirit of God moves throughout history, throughout time, in ways that surprise and include everyone. In David's time it was David's people. In Ephesians we read of a similar promise, God moving in time and space, God expanding God's House to include the Gentiles: Ephesians 2:11-22

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 — 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. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

New time. New Covenant. Same House. God moves around. I don't believe necessarily that God changes (James 1:17: There is no shadow of turning with thee). But our awareness of God goes deeper, it expands and it includes more understanding, more wisdom and more people.

What does it mean, "I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever?" Well, now that we know it isn't a house of wood and stone, it isn't a stationary house. (It's not a church even!!) Now that we know it's a house on the move, a house that goes wherever we go, we can consider deeply how dwelling in the House of the Lord might show up for us in our lives.

I believe that it shows up in charity. It shows up in giving others the benefit of the doubt, trusting their goodness and their ultimate desire for God, just like ours.

It shows up in protecting and standing for the dignity of all people, even in the face of barbarism and hatred. It is being a stand for peace, like Gandhi, like Buddha, like the Dalai Llama. Like Jesus. I will dwell in the House of the Lord. Forever and ever. Amen.

I believe it shows up in inclusion. It shows up in challenging ourselves to love the unlovable, to bring in the stranger, and to connect with the spark of the divine in all God's people. This is the new, new covenant, in my estimation. House of David. House of Israel. House of worship of Jesus. House of inclusion of all people everywhere. You and I can understand this when we let God be God and choose to not judge others' paths or understanding of life.

But most of all, dwelling in the House of the Lord means letting go and trusting that God has your back. It means being clear-eyed and courageous in the face of challenges, knowing that although it might seem we are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, we needn't fear. Because we are dwellers in the House. The House holds refuge for you and for me. And we come to this building not to seek that refuge (in this building), but to celebrate and affirm it.

What kind of House are we offering to the world? Seems to me it's not a House of walls but a House where walls come down. The walls come down in this house. And

we welcome ourselves, each other, and this one and that one. And we go forth in trust that the God of David, the God of Israel, the God of Jesus, James and Peter and John, the God of our grandmothers and grandfathers, our mothers and our fathers, is the same God, occupying the same House, seeking the lost and blessing the found, today, tomorrow and forever.