

July 19, 2009

## A House For God

Have you ever been in a place, stood at a point or experienced a moment where you felt the awesome presence of God? Perhaps it was on a mountain, overlooking the Grand canyon, Niagara Falls, seeing a beautiful sunrise or sunset, being near a crystal lake or at some other overwhelming site. It was for you a liminal moment where heaven and earth seem to have had confluence. Time and space seemed suspended. And, that place became sacred and holy for you forever. I have experience a few of them throughout my life. We all have!

### I. David And A House For God-II Samuel 7:1-14a

The religious saga of David continues this Sunday with the King having settled into the land of the Jebusites, established his headquarters at Jerusalem and built a beautiful palace in the City of David. Being one who loved the Lord and grateful for God's blessings, he wanted to build a house, a permanent place for the Ark of the Covenant of God. It was an awesome time for David and he like Peter, James and John on the Mountain of Transfiguration wanted to enshrine it forever. He shared his intentions with the prophet Nathan, but Nathan was visited that night by God and given a different message for David.

Just as God had not been pleased that Israel like other nation wanted a king, now God preferred not to have David build him a house. Why do you suppose that was the case? What implications could we draw from that today? What is the purpose of church structures? In God's permissive will, he had permitted Israel to elect a king. In time a house, a sacred and special place for God would be built, but not at this time.

God through Nathan said to David, "Are you the one to build me a house? I have not had a house since the days I brought you out of Egypt." For nearly four hundred years, God had never asked any leader of Israel to build him a house or temple in which to dwell.

Instead of a house for God, God was going to establish a house of David, a dynasty of the line of David through David's descendants. That was God's intention from the time God chose David from tending sheep in the house of Jesse.

God had been with David when he defeated Goliath and the Philistines, when David fought with the forces of Saul and when he was a mercenary among the Philistines and other tribes. Now that David had defeated his enemies and founded a city, he and his people were to reside securely in the City of Peace. The people would be planted upon this lovely mountain as in a green pasture. Their souls would be revived. They would be guided along right pathways, walk through valleys of the shadow of death, fear no evil, be comforted in times of trouble, sit at tables of abundance, eat their full and be blessed with prosperity and good will all the days of their lives. So wrote the psalmist in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. A temple for God in Israel would be left to David's descendant.

Reading about David's desire to build a house for God, I have to ask, "Why does God who created the universe and everything in it need a house in which to dwell?" What is the purpose of a house of God-a temple, church or Mosque or any sacred place? Why set aside sacred places?

## II. Jesus Carried the Sacred into The Market Place-Mark 6:30-40, 53-56

In Mark 6, Jesus is again ministering to the multitudes gathered around Lake Gennesaret. Many were pressing in upon him and followed him everywhere he went. A large crowd followed him around the lake. Seeing this great multitude, he had compassion upon them because as he said, "They were like sheep without a shepherd." There are multitudes of people today, many of whom are young people, who are like sheep without a shepherd. They too need a shepherd. But, why are so many of the houses of God nearly empty on the Lord's day? Why are the coliseums, theaters, recreational centers and parks so full? What is really happening with the mega-church phenomena and with large groups of people who go to no church? There seems to me to be something wrong with this picture. Oh, we could dismiss it and say that the world is just becoming weaker and wiser. However, is that really the case? If not, what are we called to do in and through our sacred places?

Around Lake Gennesaret, Jesus had compassion upon the shepherd-less sheep, healed their sick and cast out demons from them. Why there? Could it be because Jesus went out to them wherever they were, was with them in their suffering, had the audacity to touch them with God's healing and saving grace where they hurt and made sacred even their spaces? Why does that seem not to be the case today? Could that be because too few of our houses of God are evangelizing where people really are, too few are being with people where they suffer, too few are truly touching people with God's healing and saving grace and too few are seeking to make holy those spaces? Are our churches having compassion upon the shepherd-less multitudes? And, are we truly feeding, embracing and bring God's saving and healing grace to them wherever they are? How can we carry the awesomeness that we experience from time to time everywhere we go? Perhaps, there is something that missing in our sacred spaces.

## III. Breaking Down The Dividing Walls-Ephesians 2:11-22

In Ephesians, Paul again picked up the theme of a house of God without any dividing walls. In Paul's time the partition in the church was between Jews and gentiles. For our times, such partitioning is no doubt different. Paul reminded the gentile Ephesians that there was a time when there was a dividing wall between Jews and gentiles. But now through Christ's blood sacrifice at Calvary, Jesus had broken down that partition. He had gathered those who were far off together with those who were near-both gentiles and Jews. He had abolished the oppressive laws and commandments, the rules and regulations that stood in the way of true worship to God. He had created for himself one brand new humanity. Through his cross, he has reconciled both groups, put to death the hostility between them, brought peace to his divided people and sent them forth to reconcile others to his Father.

Paul then wrote, *"But you-you gentiles- are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the Foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom also you are both built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God."*

Our church, the Episcopal Church has too many dividing walls today. How can a divided church stand? Our learning from our lessons are:

1. God does not need a house in which to dwell. We do.
2. Jesus went out into the highways, byways and market places and made them sacred.
3. Jesus broke down the walls and partitions that divided his people.
4. In God's time the heavens and whole earth will be transformed and made sacred.

The existential questions are, "What walls are there that need to be torn down?" How can we become confident of and comfortable with not having these walls divide us any longer? How can we truly make our spaces reflect Christ's sacredness? In God's time and through God's efforts the right answers will come. As a matter of fact, they are no doubt already here. The question is, "Are we listening?"

In God's time, the earth and heavens will be the Lord and all of time and space will be sanctified as it is written in the book of Revelation, "*And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God, the almighty and the Lamb. And the city had no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of the Lord is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gate shall never be shut by day-and there shall be no more night there...*" Revelation 21:22-25.

#### IV. Why Build Or Why Have A House of God Anyway?

There are places that are so special-holy places -that are set aside and consecrated for us humans to be in communion with the Divine.

Such a place was for Jacob in Genesis 28, "*And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of the Lord were ascending and descending on it...*" and he said, "*How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the gate to heaven.*" Genesis 28:12, 17.

In Mark 11, where Jesus cleansed the temple, it is recorded, "*And he taught, and said to them, 'Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?' But you have made it a den of robbers.'*" Mark 11:17.

And in Matthew 6 where Jesus taught about prayer, we find, "*And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who is in secret will reward you.*" Matthew 6:5-7.

In conclusion, therefore, although all of the earth is the Lords, there are those special places where humans can often and more easily make contact with the Divine. They are thresholds, gates to heaven. God in God's permissive will allows and provides them because we humans need them. Whenever, they enhance our relationship with God, they serve their purpose. People find a connection with the Divine and are inspired to spread the blessing..

May this place always be a place of prayer for all nations! May it be a threshold to God, the very gate to heaven! May it be a place where people are truly fed, healed, saved and strengthened to go forth and share the good news of Christ Jesus with others! That is my hope and my prayer. Amen.