

## **“Are you the One . . . ?”**

18 July 2021—8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Salado UMC—Salado, TX 76571

Preaching Text: 2 Samuel 7:1-14a

+++++

“The mightiest of weapons is truth. And everyone knows you’re not permitted to enter a Government building with a weapon” (John Alejandro King).

+++++

Hear the day’s lesson, 2 Samuel 7:1-14a:

**7** 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. **14** I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me (2 Samuel 7:1-14a).

Our lesson begins in Jerusalem with King David doing well. Yet our passage is a bit confusing unless we know that the conspicuous word translated “house” (consistently **bayith** in Hebrew) has three distinct meanings: 1) palace, 2) temple, and 3) dynasty (or royal house). These fluid understandings of this word “house” create traction by which the writer helps readers see the theology behind the monarchy—and perhaps why the monarchy is such a mixed bag. Walter Brueggemann writes: “David’s determination to build God a suitable house is part royal-aggrandizement (increase of power, status, or wealth) and part genuine piety” (*Interpretation: First and Second Samuel* [Louisville: W/JKP, 1990], pp. 256-7). Talk about a mixed bag.

David planning to build a house for God links to “Deuteronomic theology.” A theological explanation of Deuteronomic “theology/God-talk” is as follows: **if** people are obedient in their covenant with God, **then** life will go well for them. Conversely, **if** people defy God’s command, **then** punishment follows. Thus, the Deuteronomic historian points to Israel’s unfaithfulness as the reason for the nation’s eventual ruin enacted by Assyria and Babylon. The Israelites sometimes worshipped idols instead of Yahweh, even after frequent prophetic warnings.

Deuteronomic historians also pointed out Israel’s idolatry, not only in the worship of false idols, but likewise putting their King before Yahweh. In fact, a common phrase in 2 Kings is that he [the king] “did evil in the sight of the Lord.” The Deuteronomic historian seems to employ a “blame the victim” approach in explaining what evil befell Israel (see deuteronomic material in Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Jeremiah).

Near the core of Deuteronomic history, 2 Samuel 7 ties the threads holding this history together: David’s consolidation of the kingship, the account of a roving ark, and today, God’s covenant with David and descendants. The passage states that having won peace and stability, David now decides to do something for God. Yet, Yahweh reminds the king that God is chiefly a provider, not a recipient. It is God who brings David to this moment. Thus, David building a “house” for God seems silly in a sense. God plainly prods David’s memory: God will build a “house” of him. House in this sense is not the house for God as a temple, but rather house as a dynasty for David and his posterity. As the Brueggemann quote reminds us: David’s determination to build God a suitable house is part royal-aggrandizement and part genuine piety—a mixed bag! God’s proactive grace is a healing corrective for problematic human ambition—and each of us, like David, is prone to over-reach!

Of course, we want people to show ambition in life. We like to see initiative and drive in people. When I was pastor in Georgetown, I had a few people on the Pastor-Parish Committee that constantly lamented that our custodian did not have any life goals or aspirations. They wanted him to take more

initiative; be more resourceful. I quickly pointed out that first of all he was a first-rate custodian and cared deeply about the church and its building. Second, I told them that if he had any more initiative, he would not be our custodian and then we would have to find another. They hurriedly abandoned the issue.

We challenge our children to do well in school because we think and believe if they do, then their determination will offer them opportunities to succeed in life. Yet, sometimes aspiration for others can cause us to overreach. In our pride we make mistakes that we ought not to make. David thought he was going to take care of God—and yet God reminded the king that it is God who takes care of David and Israel and . . . well . . . everything else. Often our pride clouds our judgment. We say and do things that in the big picture are silly.

Do you know the story of a king who was suffering from a malady and was advised by his astrologist that he would be cured if the shirt of a contented man were brought for him to wear? People went out to all parts of the kingdom after such a person, and after a long search they found a man who was really happy, but he did not possess a shirt (*The Christian Evangelist*).

Ambition typically grows through the following stages: “be like Dad . . . be famous . . . be a millionaire . . . make enough to pay the bills . . . hang on long enough to draw a pension” (*Bits & Pieces*, September 1989).

Please do not misunderstand me. David was an ambitious king. He offered Israel the longest period of peace and security in Israel’s history. Yet sometimes ambition can be something of an Achilles’ heel for human beings. Without ambition, our lives may become routine and hollow. We need to celebrate ambition and enjoy the better present and future it brings. At the same time, it would be good for us to remember that an overweening pride that creates a lusty ambition can make us people who want power and influence at any cost. People who have single minded ambition are those who may be prone to neglect friends. Their just deserts may be loneliness and alienation from others.

Note how we talk: “I took Jesus into my heart.” “I accepted God when I was baptized.” No . . . we do not let God into our lives; God takes us into God’s life.

During the last decade of his reign, I wonder how many evenings David ate alone in the palace. It is but a question . . . (1 Samuel 17:29).