

“Temple Dedication and Solomon’s Prayer”

22 August 2021: 13th Sunday after Pentecost

Preaching Text: 1 Kings 8:(1, 6, 10-11), 22-30, 41-43

Salado, Texas 76571

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“There are more tears shed over answered prayers
than over unanswered prayers”
(Saint Theresa of Jesus).

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Hear the day’s lesson:

Dedication of the Temple and Solomon’s Prayer

[8 Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion . . . 6 Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim . . . 10 And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, 11 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.]

22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. 23 He said, “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, 24 the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. 25 Therefore, O Lord, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, ‘There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.’ 26 Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David.

27 “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! 28 Regard your servant’s prayer and his plea, O Lord

my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; 29 that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. 30 Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive.

41 "Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name 42 —for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm—when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, 43 then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built (1 Kings 8:(1, 6, 10-11), 22-30, 41-43).

Over the years I have heard many golfers say: "I can worship God anywhere." Although I have heard my share of religious language on golf courses, the truth is that very few golfers on Sunday morning are offering genuine prayers to God on the putting greens. As we move back into our worship space from our "wandering in the wilderness," we might ask ourselves: What is the sacred meaning of a particular place of/for worship?

Most worship sites (sanctuaries, columbaria, chapels, temples, mosques, synagogues, and so forth) have something in common. People consider these places as sacred sites. It is the intended purpose behind them, that makes them "holy." Thus, because people recognize these places as sacred, they are—the power of human intention. By people using a place and intending the place to connect with the Spirit, then the site/edifice has the energy of connection. When we visit a site, even if we are not devotees of that specific religious expression, we note that there is something intrinsically sacred about it.

In these buildings or sacred sites, we conduct ceremonial rituals. We note how we design buildings to transmit musical and spoken sounds. In addition, we light candles, just as artistic figures/drawings decorate the walls. People go to sacred spaces to worship, both inside and

outside the ritual. Often, we keep silence, too. We maintain the sacred energy both by intent, and by the actions of its people. And this is so for any kind of religious temple.

To recap, we provide spiritual meaning to places of worship by our intent. The reason is, of course, because people are naturally spiritual beings. Because of human intention, these holy sites have with them a spiritual energy. Places mean what we human beings intend them to mean. Here is an account of a local bar (where “everyone knows your name” and a local church where “you are in my seat”).

Several years ago, a story titled, “Local Bar Sues Local Church” amused those with a sense of ironic humor. It seems that in a small Texas town an entrepreneur began building a new bar/tavern. A local church started a crusade of prayer meetings to block the bar from opening. Yet, work progressed. A week before the bar’s opening lightning struck and the bar burned to the ground.

Church folks were rather self-righteous after lightning hit the bar, until the bar owner sued the church on the grounds that the church’s prayers were ultimately responsible for the building burning, either directly or indirectly. In their reply to the lawsuit the church hotly denied all responsibility for the building’s destruction.

When the case came up on the court docket, the ruling judge looked at the pleadings and observed, “I don’t know how I am going to rule on this, but it appears from the paper work that what we have here is bar owner who believes in the power of prayer, and an entire church that doesn’t.”

Where one stands gives meaning to the circumstances!

The temple is a symbol of great importance. Israel can now breathe, for they have reached their destination—a homeland. Nomads for generations, they fought strange people who occupied land that God promised their ancestors. Israel journeyed via a long history starting in Hebron, then Egypt. At that time, complete with desert wanderings and murmurings, Israel sought ways to govern themselves. King Solomon understands the moment’s importance. As a

leader, he knows what to do. He assembles all the people. He places the ark of the covenant in the temple's inner sanctuary. Solomon experiences God's mystery within a thick cloud filling the temple. He offers a prayer and meaningfully, in this worship action, he invites leaders and people, to also pray. The monarch stands before God's altar, in the presence of all, and Solomon prays—for himself, for Israel, and for even the foreigners present.

Solomon's prayer is emotional and personal. He praises God for all God has done for Israel's ancestors. He concedes that people cannot restrict God to a house built by human hands. Solomon prays that God lend an ear whenever prayers rise from and toward the temple, where people worship God's holy name. Solomon appeals to God's care anyone who lifts up prayers in the temple where God's name exists.

Via this dedication ritual, Solomon offers Israel a holy place. Solomon's prayer even reminds us that our church is not where we confine God. Instead, the church is where people gather to meet God. It is where God encounters us. The site of a church is where we can know and be known by God. It is where we come into God's presence as community to worship, pray, and offer gratitude. Yet, we would do well to remember that God is considerably more than simply a building. Yet, buildings have merit.

The temple, like the church, is a sign directing us to a bigger reality—that God hears our prayers of all.

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