

Church of the Resurrection, Centerville – Proper 11B – 7/19/09

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? 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. (2 Samuel 7:4-6)

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." . . . Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. (Mark 6:30 ff)

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. . . . So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. . . . So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you 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 you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. (Ephesians 2:13-22)

God does not stay in one place. By definition, God is in all places. But also by definition God does not stay in one place.

In today's reading from Second Samuel, David wants to build a house for God. He's feeling guilty, because he's built a nice house for himself, while God's house is still a tent.

Through Nathan the prophet, David learns that this is just fine with God. When God wants something more permanent, God will decide, not David. Besides—it was a tent that provided shelter for the Ark of the Covenant when it rested at night on the long journey up from Egypt. A tent is moveable. Temporary. Adjustable. It provides just enough shelter, while reminding the people that God cannot be pinned down.

Eventually Solomon will build a grand temple of stone. But scripture tells us time and again that this solid structure was in fact less permanent than the tent. It was destroyed by enemies. The people rebuilt it—but this second temple was destroyed, too. Even The Ark disappeared. The covenant, on the other hand, survived. It survived because it was sheltered forever in the hearts of God's people, who moved out and back and out and around everywhere, over miles and millenia. Like God, with God.

David wants to build God a house. Nathan tells him that God will build *David* a house. Not of stones, but descendants. The House of David. This is not just about kings. It's about us. Our Jewish brothers and sisters are one wing of this living house. We are another. We are the House of David because we are members of the Body of Christ, the Son of David. And so the tent moves on.

God does not stay in one place.

Jesus looks at the disciples who have returned from their visits on foot to outlying villages and towns. They have brought the Good News of God's love and the coming Kingdom to all who would listen. They are tired and need a break. *"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while,"* he says. But when they get to the new place, even more people hungry for good news, for healing, show up. And Jesus is moved to the depths of his being. They are like sheep without a shepherd, he thinks. And so he teaches. He feeds (the story of the feeding of the crowd comes between the two parts of today's reading from Mark); and he heals. God does not stay in one place. God goes where the need is.

God does not stay in one place, not even in our understanding of God's word in the law and the prophets. The apostle Paul saw that more clearly than anyone—Paul, who had been raised in the deepest traditions of scripture and the finest parsing of the law. But he was the one who was blinded so that he might see the larger reality, the reality of the God who does not stand still.

So he celebrated the destruction of the walls that had seemed so permanent, the barrier between gentile and Jew. Jesus, he said, *came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. . .* And what is built after the wall came tumbling down? Not another structure of stone, but a moveable, organic dwelling: *So then you [gentiles] are no longer strangers and aliens, but you 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 you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.*

God does not stay in one place.

Last week, as most of you know, I had the privilege of attending our church's General Convention. This huge gathering is held once every three years. The legislative body is composed of a House of Deputies and a House of Bishops. There are over eight hundred deputies representing all the dioceses of the Episcopal Church—not just in the United States, but in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and parts of Latin America as well. There are also all the active Bishops of the church, I'm not sure of the total—probably about 150, plus all the retired bishops who wish to attend. Then there is the Triennial of the Episcopal Church Women—maybe only about 400 of them. Plus all the hangers-on, volunteers, exhibitors, staff, and, of course, the ever-present Press, in most cases looking for headlines rather than substance. (This is only my humble opinion.)

Anyway—God does not stay in one place. And Jesus never stands still—nor do the people who seek him. This isn't just about gays and lesbians, by the way—though the press would have you think it is. It's about anyone and everyone who deserves justice and longs to hear the good news of God's love. Lots of things along those lines happened in Convention that never made it to the headlines. And the things that did make it to the headlines were often reported with little understanding of what was really said and no acknowledgment of the honor paid to those who disagree.

Once more: God does not stay in one place.

This is the truth I believe our church is doing its best to live into. Choosing this path has already resulted in some of us losing our physical church homes to those who have broken away from the Episcopal Church. Sometimes it feels like we are going out all alone into deserted places. But we believe that Jesus is going with us, and that the

Holy Spirit is guiding our way. We believe that Christ is still breaking down the walls that have divided us, so that all may become *citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets*. We believe that Christ Jesus himself is still the cornerstone of this living temple, and that all of us are still being built together into a dwelling place for God.

My friends, that's what all the fuss is about.

God does not stay in one place. Not even in Anaheim, California. What our deputies and Bishops put together in General Convention is not some eternal structure. We know this. But I am proud of our church for being willing to exchange the fixed, stone temple for the moveable, sometimes shaky, tent. We are doing our best to follow Jesus, even into the deserted places. And the Spirit is telling us that when we do that, the people who need good news, who need to be fed, who need to be healed, will find us there.