

23 PENTECOST
OCTOBER 22/23, 2016
(I PETER 2:4-9; MARK 13:1-2)

2 SAMUEL 7:1-17
FIRST, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

A House of Love

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Please join me in prayer: *Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

At first glance, our Old Testament passage from 2 Samuel could be seen as (truth be told!)...a little boring. I mean, look at the stories we've studied over the last month and a half! We've gone from:

- God creating *everything*, and proudly declaring it to be **GOOD**, to
- God promising to bless **the whole world** through Abraham & Sarah, for *everyone, everywhere* for *all time*, to
- God using **Joseph** to protect God's people and his promise, to
- God empowering **Moses** to set God's people free from Pharaoh, to
- God blessing barren **Hannah** with a baby who would grow up to be God's prophet, who would anoint the boy David to be king.

And today, we hear about David as king...

Share some things that we know about David a boy...

Three famous stories:

1. 8th son of Jesse the Bethlehemite is chosen by God over all his brothers to one day be the king of Israel.
2. As the screens show, he was famous for his song-writing and singing ability.
3. As a simple shepherd boy, with nothing but a sling-shot and a rock, he defeats the giant Goliath and saves the army of Israel.

Years later, David proves himself as a soldier, a statesman and a pretty good servant of God. So much so, in fact, that God establishes with David a binding covenant – which is the heart of our bible passage for today. More about that in a minute...

As an adult, David, this iconic king is daring, dashing and dynamic *and...*

he **also** proves that he is, just like the rest of us, susceptible to sin.

Back in chapter 5 of 2 Samuel, David conquers Jerusalem. The very **first** thing that he has done once he makes this city his capital? He has his people build him a *palace*. It's opulent, amazing, even ostentatious – maybe like the one you see on the screens. It's a daunting and dazzling display of **David's** dominion ...

The **second** thing he does is fill that palace: with wives, concubines and, as nature would dictate, lots of kids! It's good to be the king, no...?

Well, it's not until two chapters later that King David's eye is drawn outside the opulence of his palace. One day he happens to glance out a window, and his eyes lock on that the symbol of **Almighty God's** presence among them, the **mysterious** and **powerful** Ark of the Covenant...and it's being kept in a mere...tent.

King in a palace...ALMIGHTY GOD in a tent. I'm not all that good at public math, but this much I know – that's not a formula for success. And I think that David comes to the very same conclusion – because he quickly decides to do something about the perceived imbalance of power.

Why? Maybe it's:

- out of a deep love for God, or it could be
- out of a sense of guilt for the lift of luxury he's been living,
- or even out of sense of embarrassment (*what self-respecting God would live in a mere tent???*)...

We don't know the reason why, but he asks permission of the prophet Nathan to build a house for God...and Nathan says, *Have at it*.

But after giving David the green light to build...Nathan has a terrible night's sleep.

God invades the prophet's dreams and blows out the light on the King's plans to make a home fit for the Lord. In fact, God kinda reads the riot act to both of them – David for his possibly self-serving scheme and Nathan for saying that the light was green. Says God, **Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in?**

And it pretty much goes downhill from there...for the next **5 verses** anyway. During that part of his speech, God recounts for the king the history of how God has been with his people – and with David himself. The Lord even repeat the elements of the blessing he gave to Abraham and Sarah, that they would be given: a place to live, descendants, a great name, and, through them, a blessing for all the families of the earth.

In short, God tells David that:

- Yes, he's the King of Israel...but he's NOT the King of the WORLD!
- Yes, **he's** been BLESSED, but it's a BLESSING for ALL HUMANITY at work through him.
- Yes, he's sitting on the throne in Jerusalem, but his DESCENDANT will sit on the throne of HEAVEN.

Having the desire – having even the plans and the passion for doing something – does not necessarily mean that we have either the **ability** or the right to make it work.

Carolyn and I (and our kids!) lived in St. Peter during the tornado of 1998. When the sirens had sounded, when the lights had gone out, when the day had become dark as night, we all took cover under the pool table in the basement and hoped for the best.

It was over in a matter of minutes – and we were all safe, for which we were very thankful. But we also knew that our house had been hit and didn't have a clue where-or-how to start putting the pieces back together.

As it turned out, we were well-covered by insurance, we were able to hire a great construction company, and we were even able to make some upgrades to the house that we'd wanted when we first moved in.

While the house was a mess, I decided to do a little project on my own. The door to the garage opened into the laundry area, which was great, but the room didn't have a closet for coats, boots, mops or brooms.

So, I decided to build one myself. I'd set some stud walls, I'd taped and textured sheetrock, I'd hung a few closet doors – so...I went at it and in the end was kind of proud of my little accomplishment.

Then the day came when we did the final walk-through of the house with the owner of the construction company. We'd walk into a room, he'd look at what had been done, then he'd nod his head and check off his sheet.

When we came to the utility room, he looked at my closet. He shook his head and said, *Which one of my guys did **this**?* Let's just say he was relieved that he didn't have to sign-off on **my** project!!

The author, William Golding, wrote an unsettling novel called The Spire. The protagonist of the story is named Jocelin. He's the priest of a large cathedral in 14th Century England and has designed a 400 foot spire that he wants to be built on top his church.

Just for comparison's sake – **does anyone know the height of the Foshay Tower in downtown Minneapolis?** The building itself is 447

feet. So Jocelin's **tower alone** was almost as tall that old stately structure!!

Unfortunately, Jocelin has chosen an impossible task, AND has turned a deaf ear to the truth:

- the church was built on a swamp which can't support the weight, and
- its pillars weren't solid, but just rock shells filled with rubble.

Still, the priest is convinced that:

- the building of the spire is an act of faith,
- he has been chosen by God to do this great task, and
- by doing it, he will bring the people of his town closer to the Almighty.

Unfortunately, his visions of grandeur soon become hallucinations... even as his dreams become a denial of reality. Yet still Jocelin forces the raising of the spire despite the fact that it's destroying him and the church. As the true costs, of The Spire are revealed – both financial and spiritual – the story moves to its tragic conclusion.

<http://www.enotes.com/topics/spire> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Spire

If King David was wondering what God wanted from him, he was truly blessed to get his answer. The problem for David, which is, ironically, the problem for us all, is that he/WE don't like to be told NO when we have ANY kind of plans, nor do we like to be dissuaded from doing something that we truly believe might be what God wants us to do!!!

Thankfully, David was “blessed” to have a prophet who was directed by God to speak the truth to the king. He may not have always seen it that way – especially when a prophet calls him out on his illicit affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband! But God made his promise to stick with David, and with his descendants, and with his people. Not because they had earned any special sense of grace, but simply because God had decided to bless the world through him-and-them.

-King David's plans to build God a house are tossed in the fire, which
 -should have happened to Priest Jocelin's plans to build for God a spire.
 -So...what does God want from you and me?

Well, let's turn to our New Testament lessons for today. In the Gospel from Mark, we hear the story of how the disciples, upon exiting the Temple one day, pause to admire the huge stones of the foundation and the exquisite buildings they support. *Look, Teacher, they say. What large stones and buildings!* It's almost as if they were saying, ***Look at what we could do for God if we really got our act together!!!***

Jesus' abrupt, ominous, and upsetting answer put a definitive kibosh on the disciples' desires to honor a structure built – supposedly – to honor God!! In short, he says, ***The day will soon come when these buildings and stones will be nothing but rubble!***

To find out what Jesus was truly after we need to turn to the words that were read from St. Peter. Says the disciple, *Come to him, a living stone...and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house* (1 Peter 2:4-9).

God does not need – or want! – another monument built of dead stones. Instead, God wants nothing more than for us to offer ourselves to his service as living stones. **What's the difference between a dead stone and a living stone?**

A dead stone shuts out any kind of light, while a living stone allows the light to shine through.

Now, HOW we do that – being living stones that let God's light shine through us – is so very simple...AND so very difficult, all at the same time.

In John 8:12 Jesus says, *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*

And in Matthew 5:14-16 Jesus also says, *You are the light of the world...(so) let your light shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

One thing we want to be clear about is that we're not called to be living, light-filled stones SO THAT God will be impressed with our works.

The danger is that we're always going to be tempted to do things to honor God that have nothing to do with helping our neighbor. It was:
 -David who wanted to build a temple, and it was
 -the disciples who wanted to honor the temple foundation, and it was
 -the Priest Jocelin who wanted to build a spire for God...

What's the answer for us? How are we to be living stones in a world that loves to honor God through buildings and monuments? Says the prophet Micah,

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

Or Jesus' answer to the question, *Which commandment is the greatest?* Says the Lord:

³⁰ *you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.* ³¹ *The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*

The part about serving our neighbor in these passages is key, for this reason. As David, the disciples and the priest all wanted to honor God in something concrete, even our good works can be self-serving if we're not careful, right.

Even a living stone that allows the light to shine through can be mistaken as a beautiful object all by itself. The key to being a living stone is to let the light of God shine through us so that God is glorified.

As Martin Luther once said, ***God does not need your good works...but your neighbor does.***

Amen.