

B Lectionary 21 8.25.24

1 Kings 8:22-30, 41-43; John 6:56-69

Focus Statement: God meets us everywhere

Solomon, as I hinted at last week, built a temple for God's people to worship, as God had told his father David Solomon was to do. Our reading for this morning is from Solomon's dedication of that temple, setting it aside to and for the glory of God. Just to keep Solomon in perspective and not get ourselves lost in the myth of his greatness, I remind you as I did last week, that as he was building the temple, he also built himself a house. The temple was a beautiful building constructed by the top craftsmen of the time using the best materials and took seven years to build. Solomon's house, on the other hand, was a series of five buildings built by the same expert craftsmen using the same materials, taking fourteen years to complete. So, one can wonder where Solomon's priorities lay... But, for the purpose of our time together, Solomon built a temple for worship of the Lord, and it was a beautiful place to worship.

Solomon built a magnificent building in which to worship the Lord. Solomon built a place where people could come from all over the world to experience the presence of God. And... And we hear in Solomon's prayer the recognition of something greater. Because here's the temptation of building such a beautiful place of worship, to view the building as not a place to worship God but the place that contains God. To start to feel, and to enforce the idea that, here and only here, within these walls that I built, that I maintain, that I have access to, is where God dwells. This, this place and no other, is sacred. To start to think that the building itself can contain God. Solomon, for all his humanity, knew better than to think that anything he constructed could possibly house the Lord. This prayer of dedication

really reads as a plea from Solomon to God to accept the offering of the temple. Listen to verse twenty-seven, “But will God indeed dwell on earth? Even heaven and highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!” God, Solomon says here, I know that you are infinite. God, you are everywhere so please, come here. “Regard your servant’s prayer and his plea...that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house.”

We see in Solomon’s prayer that the purpose of the temple wasn’t to house God, but to house people. God doesn’t need a house, God’s people do. God’s people need a place where they can bring their challenges and needs and trust that God will meet them. Solomon prayed that God would make the temple just such a place.

And what’s more, Solomon asked that God make the temple more than that. Solomon asked that the temple be a place not just for his people, not just for the people of Israel, but for all people. That anyone with any need could come to the temple and encounter the living God. Solomon asked God to do those things trusting that God would do them, because meeting people, all people, is who God is, is what God does. In his prayer, Solomon recounted the covenants God had made with God’s people, to be with them, support them, and walk beside them, so that they would be blessed and a blessing, not just to the people of Israel, but for all the people of the world. For all people are God’s people.

This reading about Solomon’s dedication of the temple got me to thinking about our worship space. Is it a box that we think contains God or, like Solomon, do we recognize this

building as one place of many where we trust that the God who is everywhere comes to meet God's people with any need?

I interviewed for a lot of churches when I was looking for a call and there were two which I walked into the sanctuary and immediately thought, I could worship here. Spoiler alert, those two were the first church I served in California and Trinity. This is nothing against the sanctuaries of the other churches, they were lovely, for the most part, lovely. There was one that looked like it was doubling as a storage unit, but that was the exception. Most were beautiful spaces clearly tended by faithful and dedicated worshipers, just like ours. But for whatever reason, these two just felt like home. Luckily for me, they/you were also the only two churches who offered me calls. And, I will add, I had the sense of "I could worship here" before the call was extended, so that you agreed to pay me was not the reason for the feeling. There was something in the space itself that drew me.

Something in this space drew me, but it wasn't what kept me. And as much as I know you all also love our worship space; I think you'd agree that it isn't what keeps you either. In fact, I know you agree, because we worshiped on the lawn for two summers, and being outside the building didn't stop worship. I thought a lot that summer about Trinity's tagline about how the church has left the building. I love that line because it reminds us about our ministry being outward focused, about the need to be about the whole community, and not about ourselves. The summers we were outside reminded me that we didn't need the building to worship.

There's a story I reference frequently when I'm preaching about a different chapter of John, John fourteen, about a little girl in an airport. When asked where she was going, instead of replying with the name of a city, the girl answered excitedly, "I'm going to grandmas!" I don't remember where I originally heard that story, but the author went on to remark how for the little girl the trip was not about the location but the relationship. Where grandma was physically located didn't matter as much as the love and care the girl experienced in her presence. The author makes the point that the place Jesus is building for us with God is not a physical space but a relationship. What makes this space sacred is not the space itself, it's the relationship we've developed with each other in this space, and the way those relationships draw us closer to God.

That being said, physical spaces matter. Laurie puts a lot of time and energy thinking through the aesthetics of our sanctuary, because how a space looks, sounds, feels, affects our experience. And I learned through those two outdoor summers that there is benefit to having a defined, and heated, indoor space to worship. The church literally left the building for a while, and I was really glad when the church returned to the building, because my toes got real cold and I looked pretty silly in the umbrella hat Bob got me for rain days.

What a gift it is that God has given us this place where we can gather to meet God. A place that is lovely to look at, that is *mostly* climate controlled. It's hot in here today, but if it rains, it's not going to rain on us, so that's a plus. And if it gets really warm, the rest of the building is air conditioned, you can get out of it. A place that is safe, that is friendly, where we know we are welcomed and loved exactly as we are.

And because God has given us this gift, what a gift it is to share it. Because Solomon's prayer also reminds us that this place is not just for us. Because we have such a place, we also have a responsibility to share it. I love that ours is a building that is busier during the week than it is on Sunday. That this building gets wear and tear that isn't ours, that I had a hard time focusing on writing this sermon on Thursday because Co-op was hosting graduation not just in the building, but literally in the sanctuary, and people were encountering God's love without even knowing it, in the grace and opportunity to grow and learn and change.

Dear people of God, God is here, with us, in this space. What a gift to meet God and what a privilege to share it. Thanks be to God. Amen.