

2 Samuel 7:1-14 (NRSV)

God's Covenant with David

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[a] 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.

Mark 6:30-34, 56-56 (NRSV)

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32 And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. 33 Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. 34 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.

Healing the Sick in Gennesaret

53 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. 54 When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, 55 and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56 And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

How do we get there from here? Or how did we get here from there? I've asked that kind of question a lot this week in the process of writing a sermon.

We read just a little bit ago about David wanting to build a temple and getting the go-ahead before then getting shot down, and then we just read this story about Jesus sending out and welcoming back the

apostles, and taking them away to rest, and then going back out and healing and teaching. How'd we get from one to another?

Even in the Gospel lesson today, did you notice that we skipped something? It wasn't because we don't think those verses are important. Check out subtitle in this section of Mark chapter 6. If your Bible has subtitles, it probably says *Jesus Feeds the 5000* just before we started reading. That's an important story. I imagine you've all heard it before. But that's what we skipped. We're saving it for next week. So if the middle of these verses isn't what took us from the beginning to the end, what did? What does? How do we get there?

I think we get there through Christmas.

Now, Christmas in the western world is pretty weird. And we'll hear sermons for the rest of time about how we miss the point of the season when we make it about commercialism and presents. But we do a lot of things that are representative of the point. We buy gifts and wrap them up and stick them under the tree and then we wait, and wait and wait through December to open them. God had a present for his people, and they had to wait for it, but Christmas was when we finally got to celebrate that God had sent us something.

David is still waiting for Christmas. David the king is waiting for his King to come. David's newly-safe, newborn nation (oddly enough) is

waiting for the newborn savior that shows up on the original Christmas. David's people have been waiting for generations for God to be at home on earth, but David himself, the individuals around him, they've been nomads. They've been waiting on the move. They don't know how to sit still and wait. They don't know how to be settled and wait. Not even the prophet Nathan, this guy who is supposed to speak for God knows how to do that. He wants to go ahead and do something. Build something. Have a project.

I pulled up to work on Thursday morning, and the United Methodist Men were already here working. Several of the guys were standing on the sidewalk near the entryway, and they were consulting with the painter, and looking up at this wooden section that needed to be primed and painted. They were talking about the best way to solve a mold problem we'd been having in that area, and what kind of primer they needed for the situation, and where to put vents. I stood back for a second and listened to the conversation instead of just walking right past them and going in to work. And I turned to Ken Sippel and I asked him "What are you guys going to do when you finally fix this whole place?" When there are no more projects?

I asked just for fun, because I knew the answer I was going to get from him. He laughed, and he said "I don't think we'll ever run out of

things to fix around here.” Right? Know the feeling? But let me say his response again. He *laughed*, and he said “I don’t think we’ll ever run out of things to fix around here.” He didn’t hang his head and look disappointed. He didn’t say “We should just burn this place to the ground and start over!” He keeps causing the fire department to show up, so maybe he’s thinking that... but he didn’t say that. He laughed.

I asked the question knowing what the answer would be. I asked the question because I’m someone who’s always got to “Go! Go! Go!” I asked the question because I understand both that frustration, and that need to always have a project. I understand David’s unsettled spirit and his desire to do something for God. His whole people have been one singing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” with and through their lives. But God says “Wait.” God says “*I’m* going to do it.”

8:30 We sang earlier 11:00 We’ll sing in a while that Christmas song “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear.” What came on the midnight clear in the song was a message. A message that God showed up. I love the third verse of that song, that in a little more modern wording says, “Y’all are struggling. But it’s cool. Relax. God’s Christmas present is here.”

The Israelites were waiting for God to have a home. And they did build him one. They built him two, in fact. Our Old Testament reading leaves off a few decades before the first temple, Solomon’s temple, is

built. Our Gospel lesson leaves off a few decades before the second temple, or Herod's temple, is destroyed. This whole section of history is about God being at home, and yet he tells David I don't need to be at home in a temple, I'm gonna be at home in body.

Christmas is when God the Father wrapped up a gift. The gift of God the Son in the packaging of this temporary temple, a human body. The people have been saying "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. O Come, O Come, God with us. O Come, o come, God, and be with us." And God on Christmas says "Okay. I'm here." He says "I put the gift in the mail and sent it." He says I typed up my message and I hit "send."

We've been walking around with Jesus in our Gospel lessons lately. He's been doing the work of the Father, and bringing the disciples along for the ride. But did you notice how our Gospel lesson started out this morning as it picks up with them coming back to him? It doesn't say the *disciples* gathered around Jesus. It says the *apostles* gathered around Jesus. The apostles. Those who are sent out. Because now that God's been with us, he's staying with us. He was in this temporary temple of his own body, but now he's in a bunch of temples. He's in our temporary temples. 1 Corinthians 6:19 says "...your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you've received from God" He sent, we

received. And when we're his apostles, when he sends us out, and he's along for the ride.

I think we struggle with seeing ourselves the way God does. I worked for a missions organization in Ecuador. And at a staff meeting one typical Thursday afternoon, one of our group's leaders said to us "Raise your hand if you are a missionary." A room full of professional, career missionaries, and only about 50% of the room raised their hands. Even in this group, people weren't sure quite where he was going with this, and they weren't quite sure they qualified. So he gave us a little sermon on Matthew 28. The Great Commission. Those last words Jesus said about going and making more disciples. How we were ALL missionaries. We're all apostles. We're all sent out by the God who's with us.

And if you don't believe God is with us, that he's nudging us... if you don't believe God is with you and nudging you take his message to the world, I have some homework for you. I want you to get on the North Carolina Conference Youth website this week and take a look at the resolutions that were discussed at ACS this past week.

I had the incredible privilege to be a part of that youth retreat this past week, at Methodist University with about 150 students from around the conference, including 4 students from our district and including 2 student from our very own congregation. And I'm going to show you the

list of the things they talked about. That the *students* talked about this week. Not their leaders, not their college-age helpers, the high school students talked about this stuff this week:

- Resolution Concerning Professional Sports Conduct Policy Pertaining to Violence.
- Resolution Concerning Church Outreach Events
- Resolution Concerning Supplying the Kurdish Revolutionary Army
- Resolution Concerning the passage of “A Third Way” at General Conference 2016
- Resolution concerning the definition of the word “life”
- Resolution concerning the “Silent Sam” statue on the campus of UNC Chapel Hill
- Resolution concerning American peacemaking
- Resolution concerning Higher Education
- Resolution concerning Gerrymandering in North Carolina
- Resolution concerning Student Loan interest
- Resolution concerning Driver’s Education Funding

This is a group of students who knows how to “hit send.” They discussed these things. They talked about what they felt God was calling them to do, and then they sent these resolutions to Annual Conference. To General Conference. To the NFL, NBA, NHL, and MLB Commissioners. To the Bishop. To the President, the Secretary of Defense, military commanders, university chancellors, presidents, governors, and trustees. The general assembly, US Representatives and Senators including the Speaker and the President Pro Tempore, our Governor, I could go on, that’s and that’s not even the whole list. These were 14-to-18-year-old students who said “This is God’s message to us and to you, that we’ve heard” they wrapped it up and then they hit send.

The Father wrapped up his Word in the packaging of Jesus and hit send. Jesus wrapped up his message in the form of the disciples and hit send. These students, took a page from His book and they wrapped it up in the form of resolutions and hit send. 2 Corinthians 4:17 says “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” We’ve got the treasure. We’ve got it. But we’re not it. We’re the clay pots. We’re the packaging. We’re the paper and ribbon and boxes and bows, the box that gets sent to deliver the present. The message. The Word.

I asked at the beginning how do we get there from here? We’re heading to the feeding of the 5000 next week, right? We’re headed to where God is sending us in the lectionary but we’re also heading there in our lives. The Rev. Dr. Dawn Chesser says

“...God’s many hungry people can’t wait too long for us to get our act together before they are fed! They are hungry NOW! ...They need to believe that Jesus and those who call themselves his followers are not going to leave them alone to fend for themselves. They need to believe that God has a vision for this world that we cannot fully see. They need to hear about a new vision that is powerful and strong and life-changing. They need to learn the good news that Jesus can heal, that things can get better, that God can make all things new again.”

So let’s get there. Let’s get there through Christmas. Let’s be the wrapping paper for God’s Christmas present to the world. Amen.