

Devotion for the 4th Sunday in Advent (December 20, 2020)

“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...Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house...Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.” 2 Samuel 7:5-6, 11b, 16.

These months of worshiping outside our church building have given me a new perspective on these verses, where God rejects David’s seemingly good idea to build God a house (temple) and instead extravagantly declares that God will make David a great house (dynasty) that will endure forever.

After the pandemic began, as I sat at home at my computer watching the first video of Barbara chanting the psalm in the balcony of our sanctuary, right by the spot where I usually sit with other choir members, I was taken aback by the sudden lump in my throat. Of course, I was sad over the loss of many things related to my normal Sunday morning worship experience. But I think some part of my reaction was grief for the place itself. I wondered, is it wrong to be so attached to a physical place?

Certainly, the place is not the most important thing. As God tells David, God moves around! And thus, God is with us now as we worship at home or outside the building. Yet David’s son Solomon did build a temple. The buildings we construct for our worship do have a purpose; a building’s beauty and symbols help create a worshipful atmosphere and serve the proclamation of the gospel. The beautiful stained-glass cross that is the focal point in our sanctuary reminds me of the one who came to be with us, died on a cross, and lives forever.

But in these verses, God is more concerned about the promise God is making to David that David will be another kind of house, and his kingdom will last forever, longer than any building. As Christians, we look for (as Luther would put it), “what shows forth Christ.” The reign of the house of David will be fulfilled in the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. In the Gospel for today, Luke tells us that Mary was engaged to a man of the house of David, and that an angel brought the news that her son, Jesus, would be given “the throne of his ancestor David,” would reign forever, and “of his kingdom there will be no end.” Luke 1:27, 32-33.

So, wherever we worship, hallelujah for this good news! For he shall reign forever and ever. Hallelujah!

O God of tent and temple, sanctuary and home, we rejoice in your presence with us wherever we gather to worship you. We thank you for your grace-filled promises, and especially for the promise fulfilled in your son, our savior. In his name we pray, Amen.