
My Sermon from Sunday July 18, 2021, '8th Sunday after Pentecost' ~

"Where Does God Wish To Dwell?"

Note To Readers: *The scripture for this sermon is found in the Service Outline (emailed or mailed) for July 18, 2021. I encourage you to read the Old Testament passage from 2nd Samuel and the epistle from Ephesians before you read the sermon. I have also included it here for your convenience. Thank you!*

2 Samuel 7:1 –14a 'Nathan's Vision'

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 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." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you."

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. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" 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; 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. 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, 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. 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. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.

Ephesians 2:11 – 22 'We Are A Dwelling Place For God'

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision" — a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands — remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 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. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 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.

Speak Lord, your servants are listening. Amen.

When I was a little girl, I was told that the church building was God's house and so we needed to be respectful and quiet in church. Today, I agree that our worship spaces are consecrated to the glory of God and are sacred spaces, filled with the presence of God, but where is the dwelling place of God?

Where does God live?

Where does God choose to live?

I teach the children that Jesus lives in our hearts. And we sing this song:

*"Into my heart, into my heart,
come into my heart, Lord Jesus.
Come in today. Come in to stay.
Come into my heart Lord Jesus."*



My 9 year old grandson **Luke** asked me this week why does God live in our hearts? Luke

was wondering about this in a literal way. I said to Luke, *"Good question. We use our hearts as a place where we feel love. We have done this for thousands of years. It used to be believed that the heart experienced emotions such as love. We still use hearts as a symbol of love. Many of us use heart emojis on our texts and emails. I know that I do. We send hearts on Valentine's Day."*

Where does God wish to dwell? The answer is clear. Within us. Within our souls. Within our hearts.

Over 3,000 years ago, King David was asking this very question. David believed that God wished to dwell in a fine home on earth. David was living in Jerusalem in a fine home of cedar while the ark of God was in a tent. God dwelled in a portable tabernacle. David didn't feel this was right as his own lodgings were permanent. David's prophet, Nathan, agreed with David and told him to go ahead and build a permanent temple for God. *"The Lord is with you."* (2 Samuel 7:3). Nathan made this affirmation before he had taken the request to God.

That night, Nathan had a dream and the Lord said that he did not wish to have a permanent home. God basically said, *"No thanks David. That is a nice offer. However, I will make you a house."* In the vision to Nathan, God made a covenant with David and said that he would *"raise up your offspring after you. He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."* This house would be David's dynasty, culminating in Jesus, the Messiah. This home for God would be within the hearts of David's ancestors.

Following these significant visions, Nathan has the courage to go to David and tell him not to build the temple. It was not God's will for David. I commend Nathan for his courage in changing his mind and speaking about it. He would have known that David would not find this to be happy news. David wanted to build the temple and have that as his legacy.

I understand how he must have felt. When I was the Rector at *West Thunder Bay*, we developed the plans to re-build *St. Mark's* in Rosslyn village. Oh, how I wanted to see that project completed and be the Rector when the doors of the refinished church were opened, but that was not God's plan for me.

Later on, Nathan shows tremendous courage again and condemns David for his affair with Bathsheba and for arranging the murder of Bathsheba's husband Uriah.

David believed that the Lord's prophecy to Nathan meant that David's son Solomon should build the temple. And this is indeed what happened. The first temple in Jerusalem would be built by King Solomon. This temple would be destroyed in the 6th century BC and then re-built and destroyed again in the first century AD by the Romans. Now only part of the foundation remains and Jewish people continue to pray there daily.

Where does God wish to dwell?

The church is the body of Christ and you and I are God's temple. In our reading for the 8th Sunday after Pentecost from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes this:

"We are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God."

Ephesians 2:22

In Paul's letter to Christians in Corinth, he confirms

"that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwell in you. . . . For God's temple is holy and you are that temple."

1 Corinthians 2:16-17

Paul knows from a deep and reflective place that our bodies are where God chooses to dwell. We invite God into our hearts and into our lives. We open the door of grace in faith and in belief and God enters in. **Believers are God's dwelling place.**

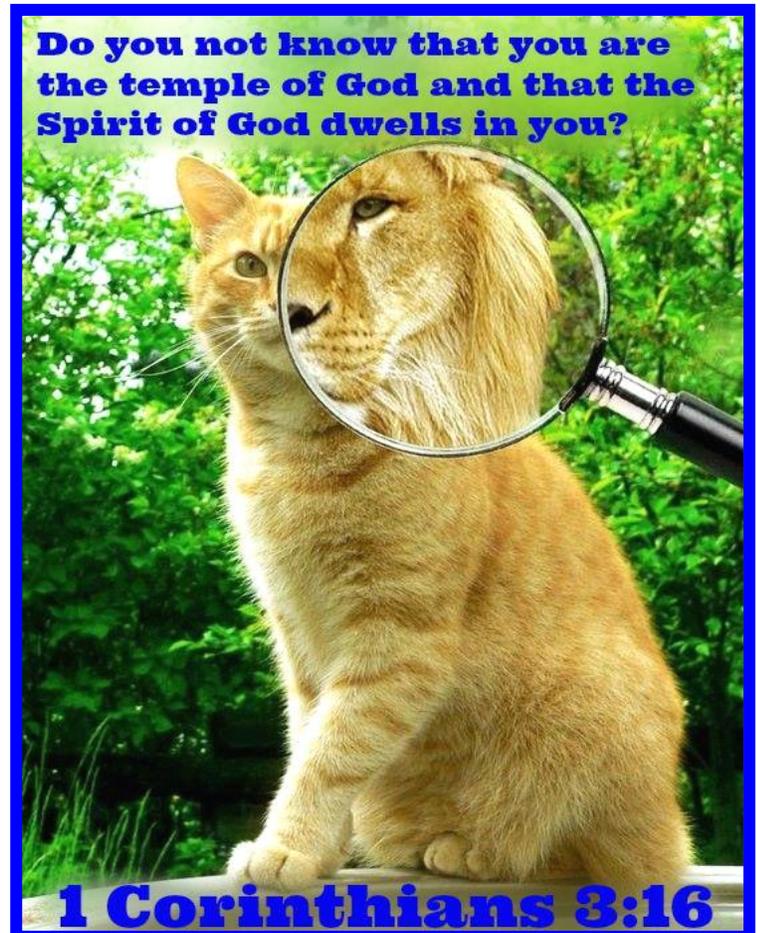
Like the apostle Paul, some of the great mystics of the Middle Ages have articulated the dwelling place of God as being inside each of us.

Here is an example from a revelation, a vision, given by God to **Julian of Norwich** in the 14th century. I am quoting from her book *Revelations of Divine Love*:

"And I was still awake and then our Lord opened my spiritual eyes and showed me my soul in the middle of my heart. I saw my soul as large as if it were a kingdom and it seemed to me to be a glorious city. In the centre of that city sits our Lord Jesus, true God and true man, glorious, highest Lord. He sits in the soul, in the very centre, in peace and rest and he rules and protects heaven and earth and all that is."

And Julian of Norwich also wrote this: *"We ought to rejoice greatly that God dwells in our soul. Our soul is made to be God's swelling place."*

Less than 200 years later, in the 1,500s, **Teresa of Avila** had similar visions. She received a vision of a crystal castle that lives within each of us. During our spiritual growth, each of us moves through 7



interiors or mansions of this castle until our souls ultimately connect with God. Here are her own words, translated into English from Spanish:

*“The human soul is so glorious that God himself chooses it as **his dwelling place**.
The path to God, then, leads us on a journey of self-discovery. To know the self is to know God.”*

We have always been taught to treat our worship spaces with the respect they deserve. It is even more important to treat each other with the respect we each deserve. Your body is a holy temple for God. Your body is where God chooses to live. Your body is where God wishes to live.

Let us all live with the courage of the prophet Nathan. Let us be willing to change our minds, to show grace under pressure, and to say and do the right thing.

I will close with a favourite prayer written by St. Teresa of Avila:

*Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing cause you fear.
All things pass.
God is unchanging.
Patience obtains all:
Whoever has God needs nothing else.
God alone suffices.*

Amen.

Archdeacon Deborah+

