

Pentecost 7B
2 Samuel 7

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July 23, 2006

David and the Prophet Nathan

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. (2 Samuel 7:1-14a)

I need to do a little self-disclosure here and I beg your indulgence. I am the oldest of three girls. My sister Liz is two years younger than I, Paula just 17 months younger than Liz. As the oldest I was the first to be left "in charge." Instructed to baby-sit my younger sisters I was full of newfound power and authority. Naturally it did not go over well with them at all and since we were so close in age, it wasn't long before my powers were diminished and it was each sister for herself whenever my parents left the house. The heyday of my family leadership had all too quickly come and gone. Years passed. And I graduated from seminary and was ordained. Naturally my ordination was a special event in the family and we had a grand celebration but my sisters were quite clear that I was and would always remain Chris and that the title of Pastor carried no weight with them. Not that I expected them to bow and kiss my ring, but did that have make SUCH a big deal out of the fact that I was, after all, merely human? Still just their sister?

And of course, in the end, my dad still calls me "Sis," my husband still calls me "Hon," my kids still call me "Mom." They remind me time and again of the primary relationships and roles in my life. I sometimes wonder what the president is called by his family and friends. What about the pope? Barbara Walters? The Secretary of State? Or the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?

King David encounters a similar reminder of his primary relationship in the message from Nathan the prophet. But before we look at that we need to back up just a little bit. Way back in chapter 2 of 2 Samuel, David is anointed King of Judah, the southern kingdom. Although there is not much detail about this event, history would support it being an event of some circumstance and fanfare. David however, was not yet anointed king over Israel in the North. Abner, who had been commander of Saul's army, made one of Saul's sons king of the northern kingdom. There was much animosity between what was called the house of David and the house of Saul. Chapter 3 says that there was a long war and "David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker." If you like political intrigue, and not a little blood shed, take a look at chapters 2, 3 and 4. Although this is oversimplifying: suffice it to say that after much plotting and revenge, eventually Abner dies and Saul's son, King Ishbaal is assassinated. Then all the tribes of Israel, the northern kingdom, came to David and David is anointed king over both Israel in the North and Judah in the South.

David is anointed by the priest Samuel in his youth, he is valiant on the battle field as a young soldier, he is anointed King over first the south and then over the entire kingdom, and finally he establishes his capital and declares Jerusalem the center for worship by bringing the ark of the covenant there. David is truly an impressive leader. A faithful man of God, a stalwart warrior, a strong and charismatic leader, a king. And so begins our story today.

David the king is settled in his new palace and declares to Nathan his intent to do something about the modest dwelling of the Lord. Now listen again very carefully to the first few verses. Pay attention because there will be a test.

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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;

Did you hear it? Did you hear the shift? The place where God reminds David what his primary relationship is? In the first three verses, David is referred to as **the king** three times. But when God speaks it is to call him "**my servant David**." God does this twice and then calls him a prince...a rank clearly lower than King. God reminds David that while he may be king, he is still God's servant. This is David's relationship to God. And when God refers to David's earthly role, God calls him *prince*. A reminder this time of God's relationship to David. King David is God's servant. And God is David's King.

This is particularly interesting because David really has not done anything that would seem to warrant God taking him down a peg or two. All David did was express a concern that the house the Lord God dwelt in seemed so much less than that in which David was given to dwell. So what was God up to?

Now fast forward to the Gospel story. The disciples have just returned from their first mission trip without Jesus. On this trip they learned that they could do much of what Jesus could do: teach, preach, heal and cast out demons. When they return, the gospel writer calls them apostles for the first time. Up to this point they have been called disciples. Disciples are students or followers. Apostles are messengers, envoys, people empowered to speak on behalf of the one who has sent them. So after this missionary journey, returned with their newfound power, Mark considers the disciples worth promoting to apostles. And now they are gathered back with Jesus and he encourages them to get in the boat for a little rest and retreat. Of course, by the time they arrive at the far shore, they are besieged by the pitiable multitude and Jesus began to teach them. The part of the story that is left out by the lectionary is when Jesus calls upon the disciples to feed the thousands with five loaves and two fish. And then Jesus puts his disciples back in the boat to send them on while he dismisses the crowd and goes to pray. When they finally get to their next landing, Jesus continues his work.

Our reading from 2 Samuel and our reading from Mark are quite unrelated to each other. Written centuries apart to completely different audiences it would be a mistake to assume one was written to help us understand the other. But there are messages in these two readings that serve each other.

When we left David we wondered why God was dressing him down and reminding him that he is but a prince or a servant. God did not intend to undermine David's confidence in his earthly authority or to strip David of the power that he had in the kingdom. God did intend to remind David that David's plans may not be God's plans. David wants to build a house for God, but God wants to make of David a house, or a dynasty. And out of that dynasty would come such as king as could build a house for the Lord. God wants a house, but the timing and the contractor will be according to God's plan, not David's. David is tripped up in his grand plan, but God still has big plans for David and God will make him great through the work that God has given him to do.

Jesus' disciples came back from their trip new men with new skills and new authority. But they need a rest. Jesus twice puts them in the boat to get that rest. At the end of the day there was still work to do but Jesus sends them on ahead while he finishes up. Why? The disciples have done nothing wrong. But Jesus sends the same message to the disciples that God sent to David: while the power of God can be at work in us, as it was in the disciples, the power of God can also be at work without us.

We have spent a lot of time over the last several years lifting up the importance of vocation: reminding each other that we have each been gifted and equipped by God in order to serve God's world and God's people. Both David and the disciples had vocations to pursue, work for which they had been blessed by God. But David is cautioned and the disciples are reminded that while God's work is done through them, God's work also gets done without them.

As prince or apostle we understand that we have the power to be the voice and the hands of God in the world. But as disciple or servant, we are reminded in whose hands the world rests. We are reminded of the God-ness of God, of God's power and authority. It is an awesome and humbling thing to be reminded of the magnificent power of the Creator God and more awesome and humbling still that God, this mighty God, would love us so much to give us Jesus, the true King of our lives, whose life, death and resurrection have blessed and redeemed us. Amen.