

The House the Love Built
The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Jennifer Gingras
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2 Samuel 7:1-17

What did you want to be when you grew up? Nurse, teacher, doctor, lawyer, therapist, musician, veterinarian, actor? Did you want to be the president of the United States? Perhaps you wanted to be a pro baseball player or the singer in a pop band or an Army Ranger.

Or were your aspirations in life less professional and more personal? Did you always want to be someone's spouse or parent? Did you want to have a large family and be surrounded by happy and healthy grandchildren? Did you want to write a children's book or paint watercolors or grow roses?

We all have dreams that carry us through life – and yet – we all encounter frustrations along the way. Most of us get some of the things we want out of life, but none of us get everything! Frustrations and setbacks are just a part of our human existence.

Our lesson from Scripture this morning is a story about frustrated ambitions. It's that pivotal moment in King David's life when he is told by his court prophet, Nathan, that his ambition to build a temple for the Lord will not be realized.

Having united the people, bringing about a temporary peace and prosperity to the new nation-state of Israel, the next obvious step for David would have been to build a temple for God. After all, it was God who everyone believed, had brought him so much prominence and success.

But it was not to be. The house that David aspired to build would be built by his son, Solomon. And the house that God would make of David was not of stones but rather flesh and blood.

As a building, Solomon's house of stone would last about 350 years; but the house of David still stands today. The last Davidic king of Israel died in exile about 500 years before Jesus was born. But the people of God, David's true dynasty, are alive and well.

You and I are the spiritual heirs of that dynasty, of a people who say "yes" to God and no to the powers of frustration and setback.

The Bible is a vast collection of stories about people saying yes to God and no to living in self-pity or self-indulgence, both of which are manifestations of despair.

We say yes when God closes one door and opens another. The people of God do not succumb to despair, or completely surrender to their pain or frustration. They do not stare blankly at closed doors or pound on them with their fists or wring their hands and offer empty consolations.

Instead, they go for the opportunities offered by God to do what can and should be done to bring justice and healing and peace to a badly broken world.

They are in constant conversation with a still-speaking God, of whom they perpetually ask the ultimate question, "What would you have me do?"

And as the answer becomes clear, sooner or later, they go for it. They live, no longer for themselves, but rather for what they believe God is calling them to be and do in their time and place.

And in making the decision to live for that ultimately prevailing, undying love, they accept God's freedom from the shackles of the self.

"For freedom Christ has set us free," the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Galatia. *"Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."*

What is it that you believe God is calling you to do with the rest of your life? Simply to carry on carrying on? No, you were made for far more than that.

The defining expression of Christianity is love;
and the defining act of Christianity is hospitality;
and the defining responsibility of Christianity is to stand with the people at the margins, the vulnerable, the abused, and the abandoned;
and the defining role of a Christian is to be an advocate and an ally.

This is how my parents raised me; This is what I was taught in my church's Sunday school; This is what I learned in Seminary; This is what I have witnessed from faithful people; This is what my denomination– the United Church of Christ - requires of me; This is what Christian scripture reveals to me:

We are the House that LOVE built.

Instead of building a grand temple, God encouraged David to sit back, relax, and enjoy the miracle of what they had accomplished together, trusting that at the right time, someone else will finish the job.

Now, that might sound good to us, but I can't help detecting a sense of melancholy as David accepts the reality that he will be long dead before the grand vision is fulfilled.

But it isn't the first time this has happened in our narrative arch.

Abraham and Sarah were told their family will be as numerous as the stars in the sky and will bless all the peoples of the world, and yet Sarah dies having only given birth to only one child, never to experience the joys of being the matriarch of a large extended family.

Moses was called to lead the people through the wilderness and into the Promised Land, but after 40 years of leading, preparing and empowering he only catches a glimpse from a distant mountaintop before he returns home to his creator.

Like Sarah, Moses and King David, we are all in the process of "becoming", continuing to learn what is loving and good, and what will bring peace and stability so that we learn how to live in, not against, God's own good time.

It's such a difficult concept; one that hits us right in our sense of mortality. We will never see or be fully aware of the difference we have made in other people's lives. But just because God's time doesn't always fit into our plans does not mean that we stop speaking up, or that we give up or lose hope.

And maybe that's why the tent was God's preferred "place." The tent as Tabernacle had started in the wilderness. As the people moved, they packed up the tent and went to the next place where they set it up again. Rather than representing a God who was in one place, the Tabernacle represented a God who was nimble and always on the move.

I wonder how many times we have tried to tie God down to a particular place. One of the blessings of this pandemic is that we have been reminded of Paul's words to the early church - God doesn't live in a building, instead "*God lives in you*" (2 Cor 6:19; Romans 8:11). We take God with us everywhere we go.

For those listening to the voice of a still-speaking God, the possibilities are endless, and even the sky is not the limit, because we believe that there is more in this world than we can see - an infinite love. Even in times like this. And with infinite love, there are infinite possibilities. Amen.