**A House, A Home, Hesed**

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Texts: 2 Samuel 7:1-17; Ephesians 2:11-22

During this Lenten season, we have been taking a look at each of the covenantal promises between God and the people of God. This morning, we turn our attention to the covenant with David.

A little reminder as we catch up to today’s story…This is David, the little boy shepherd, whose dad didn’t even bother to bring in from the field when Samuel was evaluating his sons for their kingly potential…the little brother, sent to deliver lunch to his big brothers on the battlefield, who ended up bringing down the giant Philistine warrior with a pebble and a slingshot…the gentle and musically gifted child who charmed the king and earned himself a place in Saul’s court…the warrior who consistently beat all the odds and won his way to being a celebrated and loved king of Israel. This guy is blessed. He’s got the Lord’s favor. And as we join him this morning, he’s established his rule over the kingdom of Israel and is finally resting peacefully in a fine house.

Now he notices that while he’s sitting comfortably in this beautiful house, God still resides in a simple tent. Deciding that this just isn’t fair given all that God has done for him, he consults with his prophet Nathan and announces his plan to build an equally fancy, sturdy, and permanent house for God. It is only right to show his gratitude in this way. Nathan agrees and they go to bed.

But then Nathan gets a late-night visit from God.

God begins by reminding David through Nathan that God has walked with the people of God since the beginning of time, God brought them out of slavery in Egypt and wandered around with them in the wilderness, and was with them when they established their kingdoms. And in all this time, for indeed it has been a long time, has God ever asked anyone to build God a house of cedar? No, God has not.

Then God reminds David, “Look, David, my servant, I plucked you out of sheep pasture. I have followed you wherever you went. I secured your victory in battle. I made you prince over my people. And I’m not done, I will make you great and your people safe in a home of their own.”

Then God begins to play with words. God declares that David will not build a house for God, but God will build a house of David. What David can only build with physical stone and wood, God can build with living stones and loving spirits. David can build a structure out of cedar, but God is going to build a kingdom out of us.

This is a theme we will see again. Indeed, what God starts here will be continued in the Davidic line when Jesus Christ, born of the line of David, becomes the cornerstone. Peter is the rock on which Jesus will build the church. And we, included in the Davidic covenant through the acts of Jesus, are built together into the house of God.

One of the things that amazes me most about this text is that it was likely not written until well after the kingdom of David had fallen. It was likely written while the people of God were in Babylonian exile. David’s earthly kingdom, which had lasted a little more than 400 years, is no more and the cedar and stone temple that David’s son Solomon had built had been destroyed. This is when the people of God choose to remember and record God’s promise to build a house out of David…when the house of David has fallen.

I wonder if it’s comforting, in that moment, for them to cling to the truth that God doesn’t depend on physical buildings…that God doesn’t build with material that is easily destroyed. God, who has wandered the wilderness with them before will do it again. And God’s house remains as long as the people of God remain to be the house, no matter where they are, no matter how hard things get. God’s never forsaken the people before and God won’t forsake them now.

I wonder if it’s comforting, in this moment, for us to cling to that truth. In a season where church attendance is dropping, where more people are claiming to be done with the church, and an alarming number of young Americans haven’t ever even been in a church building at all, is it comforting to know that God builds out of living stones? In a season where discord and anger seems to be on the rise and the peaceable kingdom of God seems even farther away, is comforting to know that God remains with us, constantly tending to the house God builds out of human hearts even when they seem spread so thin, exiled in a hurting world?

The gift of the Hebrew scriptures is the ability to see God walk with humanity through the roughest of times and never let us go. No matter how many times we mess this stuff up, God remains in relationship with us. This pattern of exile and return helps us know that God’s love is stronger than the physical and fleeting constructions in this world. When we feel hopeless and far from the kingdom of God, we can look at God’s saving actions in the past and remain hopeful for the future. So those people of God stuck in Babylonian exile could look back at the story of Noah, the story of Abraham, and the story of Moses, and have faith that David’s kingdom was not over and look forward with messianic hope for the future.

So God tells David that God will build a house of David. David is a building block for this house that will extend forever. Now we often talk about God living in us, living in our hearts, but it often is spoken about as the personal relationship between us and God. God is with me all the time. And that is true, but here, I wonder if we can’t just turn this idea a little bit and see it hold another truth as well, one that is a little more expansive.

God chose David and covenanted with him to build a house of him, from his sons and daughters, that would continue forever. God isn’t building a house for David, but out of him and his family, a house where the love of God dwells within that community. It’s not a house for David, but a house out of David, for God and all who God invites to come inside.

How would it change your daily living to imagine yourself as building material for God’s house? To be one part of something that God Godself is building in this world? Would you walk around looking for other people who are also building blocks? Would you be more on the lookout for exactly where you fit, and they fit, among all those building blocks? Would it make you less worried about your design when you know God holds the blueprints? Would it make you more thoughtful about the way you behave toward others, knowing you are creating the walls, roof, and floors for the ones that God wants to shelter?

Wherever you are, God is building God’s house with each faithful action. In the places we go in the world to wash, feed, and clothe others, the house of God stretches between us. The more places in which we share God’s love and grace, the bigger and grander God’s house becomes. Not a house built out of wood and stone, but a house built out of human love and compassion. That’s what God builds with.

Now if we are bricks, wood, and stone in this house that God is building, then it is surely God that provides the mortar to hold it together. I think God knows there’s a risk in building a house with humans. Hard as we try, we make mistakes. If this whole thing were dependent on us earning our goodness, we’d never make it. So here, God tells David, it’s not up to you. What you build is, in the whole scheme of things, fleeting. But it’s okay because I choose you. And if you try your best to love me then I can build a kingdom with you. My love is great enough to hold it all together. God promises that, no matter what this earth throws at us and no matter how badly we hurt each other and no matter how hard the consequences for our hurtfulness are, God’s steadfast love for us remains.

The word that is translated here as steadfast love is *hesed* and it is a particularly tricky word for Biblical scholars to translate. Sometimes they use steadfast love, sometimes loving-kindness or goodness or kindness or mercy. But it’s stickier than all of those. It’s a noun that’s made a verb because it leads to action. It’s how God loves in spite of our failures, our unfaithfulness, our limited nature. It’s kindness and generosity lavished undeservedly and excessively with no expectation that it will be repaid because it couldn’t. It’s unconditional grace and love as an action.

There is a Japanese art form called kintsugi where broken pottery is repaired with gold. It is informed by the belief that in embracing broken and flawed things, something stronger and more beautiful can be created. If we imagine each one of us a loving, living lump of building material that is ultimately tattered and flawed by human life, can you imagine God’s hesed as the gold that surrounds and seals each of us into something more beautiful, something stronger than we could ever be without God or without each other?

The promise of the covenant with David is that God can, will, and wants to do just that. If we are willing to try to live as God has asked, doing the best we can to love and serve God and one another wherever we can, God’s hesed will come around us like gold, forgiving, healing, and making us into something only God can build. Surrounded in God’s love, we are transformed to be just what the world needs to be whole, offering grace wherever we are because we want to act in gratitude. God doesn’t need us to build a house for God, God needs us to be a house where loving-kindness is abundant, grace is given, and peace is built when every person finds their place surrounded and refined by God’s steadfast love.