

Building Something Eternal

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My mother served a church in New Brunswick that was connected to a seniors complex and a nursing home. It was an incredible facility envisioned, built, and run by people of faith. And she used to comment that if they needed to have extra nurses or staff in the nursing home there was never funding to be found. But if they wanted to build a walkway or anything with bricks there were always government grants available.

This mornings first lesson is David looking out from his palace and seeing that the ark of the covenant, the holy relic that served as a symbol of God to the people, is sitting in a tent. And that seems wrong to the king so David calls the prophet Nathan to him and says that he is going to build a temple, a magnificent house for God. And the prophet tells David that God is with him and will bless what he wants to do. And David starts to make plans. But that night God tells Nathan very clearly that what David wants to do is not what God wants. God has not asked for the wonderful house to be built and has never wanted such a thing and prefers to be with the people.

Now I want to pause for a second and point out something. David has the best of intentions. He sees his own palace, sees the tent for the ark, and wants to build something for God. And that core idea of honouring God isn't wrong. David doesn't offend God or displease God with what he wants. Which is why God isn't angry with David. But the truth is that the temple is what David wants. God doesn't need a monument or a structure of bricks and mortar. It is not what God asks for or wants David to focus on in his life.

And that point in our lesson is where we get the twist when God talks about creating the house of David. David is talking about building something with bricks and mortar and wood and precious metals that will last for generations. God is talking about building generations of people with a promise that will lead them to hope and faith. And while there is a connection between what God and David are talking about the truth is that they are very, very different things.

David wanted to build a structure, a building, a tremendous undertaking. But what God wants from David is much more difficult. Because it involves David focussing not on what he wants, not on a legacy that people would point at and say "that's what David did" but rather a future which depends on the lives of others. For God

asks David to be a person of faith, to allow God to guide and work through his life to pass down the values and ideals and faith which will allow his descendants to endure and continue as God's people.

David never built the temple he wanted to but history and scripture tell us that his son Solomon did. Solomon's temple served as the centre of worship for the people for almost 400 years. And that building, that place was destroyed by the Babylonian armies around 587 BCE with the destruction of Jerusalem. After the Jews returned from exile they began to rebuild the temple and city. The rebuilt temple took decades to build and is mentioned in the gospels on a couple of occasions. And the Roman armies destroyed that temple in around 70 AD. And while there are some archaeological traces the temples are for the most part now simply part of history, a footnote in our faith.

David died long before the temple was ever built but even now, thousands of years later, we remember not merely who he was but the legacy which God built through him, which runs down through the ages. The promise of a better life and world through faith which we see expressed in what Jesus brings about through his life, his death, and his resurrection.

And that is where the lesson really connects with our lives. Because within all of us we have a desire to make things that last, to build something that endures for generations. Which is why my mother lamented that while people are eager to pay for brick and property they are hesitant to pay for staff despite the need or benefit.

And I should be clear that there is nothing wrong with building things which are wonderful, which honour God, and which last for generations. After all I'm preaching in this church building which was built for that very purpose and which has been rebuilt, expanded, and renovated over the years.

And putting up a building is certainly more appealing and simpler than living a good life, trusting in what God wants, and serving in the world. It is more glamorous to have a structure we can point to and say "we made that happen" than live a life where we have to trust that God will bring about something greater after us and hope that what we do impacts and affects the lives of others. It is certainly more humble that building something that others can see and more selfless a life. Which I think is the point.

Because as followers of Jesus we are called to leave our mark on the world in ways which last beyond wood and stone. Because Jesus never calls the disciples to build churches or buildings but to follow and make disciples. For what God needs is people of faith putting their trust and hope and time into service and caring and letting faith rather than ego lead them.

Because while it is not wrong to build churches and places for worship and community that is not what we are called to have as the main focus for our lives of faith. For Jesus calls us to follow, to build relationships, to show grace and love, mercy and peace. And when we do that and allow God to guide us then when we build through our faith and God creates something that touches lives and makes a difference in the world.

Because remember David assumes that what he wants is what God wants. But what God wants from us is praise and service which show and share the grace and love of God. And I know that is the more difficult thing to build. Because we know exactly how to make a structure that will last for a time. But we still are learning how to build a society, a family, an individual life which makes a difference and shows not us to the world but God.

And yet our efforts to do that- to witness to the good news, to seek justice, to resist evil, to be a beacon of light in the shadows of fear and anxiety are not simply what you do or I do but it is what we do together and as the church. And that work, that effort, extends from the lives of those who came before us, through our lives, and will continue in the lives of those who follow.

Which is why God calls us, just like God called David, to build the future not with bricks, mortar and wood but with kindness, with generosity, by being examples of love and grace. To believe not in what we know we can do but in what God is calling us to be in the world as followers of Jesus Christ.

For that is faith- believing in God and placing our trust in God as we move into the future which God envisions. By feeding the hungry, sharing the good news, caring for each other and creation itself. And when we do that God builds something that lasts not for a while but something that reaches down through the generations and out into the world and makes the promise of heaven a reality on earth.