

-Shepherd of the Mountains

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The Fourth Sunday of Advent

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“The ‘I Will Make You a House’ Plan”

Text: Isaiah 55:8-9

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:2).

Eeny, meeny, miny, moe. Let’s see, . . . which lesson to preach on this morning?

So, . . . that *Epistle’s* kind of a *dead end*, isn’t it? I mean, it’s just the last little bit of the tail end of Paul’s long letter to the Romans. It’s only - what? - *three* verses? So what do you say we eliminate *that* one right off the bat?

So then we’re down to *two* - the Old Testament and the Gospel. Eeny, meeny, miny, moe. An *old* story, or one that’s even *older*? The story of “This Old House,” or the story of *Christmas* - the *real* Christmas - the birth of the Christ, Christ *Jesus*? (Oh, and yes, I know, technically it’s just the *announcement* of the story of the birth of Christ, Christ Jesus; but you know how that is with God: when *He* says it, it’s as good as *done*!)

Eeny, meeny, miny, moe. Oh, but you all know how cranky you get when *I* want to rush to Christmas but *you’re* insistent on enjoying the last few drops of Advent as much as you do your - let’s just say, as we tend to say it around here - “Lutheran beverage.” Okay, so you know how cranky *I* get when *you* want to rush to Christmas and *I* want to squeeze out every last drop of Advent. But I do have *this* on *my* side: it *is* still Advent. Oh, admittedly, it’s the *fourth Sunday* - which would make it - what? - the fourth *quarter* - but the “game” is still on - the “waiting” game that is Advent, our patient waiting for the coming of our Lord. So, it’s Second Samuel, then?

So, we’ve got ourselves a bit of a controversy, don’t we? Over a building project in the church. When does *that* ever happen, *right*?

Yes, there’s a controversy, all right - and it’s over a house *somebody* wanted built . . . and somebody *didn’t*!

Now I’ve got to say at the start, even *prophets* make mistakes. And Nathan made a - as *Jax* likes to say - “beeg one.”

You heard the story. After pretty much a whole lifetime of war and fighting, after carrying out some of the most successful military campaigns in Israel’s history, King David found himself enjoying a rare period of peace. “*The Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies.*” But with nothing but time to think - there in his big, beautiful, new palace - he began to be uncomfortable that there he was in the lap of luxury while Yahweh Himself was sleeping in a tent, as it were - while the Ark of the Covenant, that is - while the very place of the Lord’s presence among His people - had been relegated to a temporary tabernacle of fabric and skins.

So he had an idea. He dreamed a dream. He hatched a plan. The “I will make You a house” plan. The plan to build a house for the Lord.

He shared the idea with Nathan. The prophet *loved* it. The prophet assured him, “*God will love it!*”

“Leave it up to your imagination,” the man of God encourage, “Leave no stone unturned. Spare no expense. ‘*Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you,*’”

Only we have to wonder what “*Lord*” he was talking about, don’t we? Surely not the Lord of heaven and earth!. Clearly not the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob.

For *that* Lord didn’t like the “I will make you a house” plan at *all!* And he wasn’t afraid to say so: “Never lived in a house *before*, don’t intend to *now*, don’t have any plans to in the *future*.”

Okay, so maybe He didn’t say the “don’t have any plans to in the *future*” part. But the *rest* is all *Him*:

1 Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, 2 the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.” 3 And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you.”

4 But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, 5 “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? 6 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 for my dwelling. 7 In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”’”

“Oh, and as for my wanna-be *builder David*,” He told his prophet Nathan, “you remind *him* where he was when I *found* him. You remind him what I *made* him. (And, mind you, of course, *I* made him!) I made him *king!*”

And while, honestly< Israel’s God wouldn’t get any

argument from David - while *that* very fact is the reason David first started *in* on the whole “I will make you a house” plan in the *first* place - still, Yahweh instructed His spokesman to give David that little history lesson, to remind him that He made him a “prince,” not a planner; a king, not a carpenter; a commander, not a contractor. *That*, and the first hint of the *new-and-improved* “I will make you a house” plan:

8 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, that you should be prince over my people Israel. 9 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. 10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, 11 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.

I dare say, never in the history of Planning and Zoning did a plan go from the red stamp of “Request *Denied*” to the black ink of “Permit *Issued*” quite so fast! Oh, the *owner* changed. And the *builder* changed. But the *plan* never changed - the “I will make you a house” plan, that is.

Now *literally*, the “I will make you a house” plan was first proposed as the “and there announces to you YHWH that a house will make to you YHWH” plan.

So what kind of a builder is YHWH? What kind of a house does *He* put up?

Clearly not a “*temple built by human hands*” (Acts 17:24, NIV), *that’s* for sure! For listen to these verses that our friends down at Lectionary Central, those well-meaning folks who set out our lessons every Sunday like your momma used to set our your Sunday “church clothes,” didn’t think were

important enough to set before us this day - this Fourth Sunday of Advent, that is:

“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom” (2 Sam. 7:12).

Oh, so this “I will make you a *house*” house is going to be “house” [in quotes], “house” as in “house and lineage,” “house and lineage” as in “*And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David)*” (Lk. 2:4, KJV). Beginning with David’s son Solomon, right?

And as long as we’re *there*, well, Nathan had more to say about Solomon. YHWH had more to say about Solomon: “*He shall build a house for my name,*” (2 S 7:13).

Well, there you go! So Solomon will get to do what David had *planned* to do? But why the change in builder? Why the change in plans?

Here’s how Israel’s King explained it to God’s people: *2 Then King David rose to his feet and said: “Hear me, my brothers and my people. I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord and for the footstool of our God 3 But God said to me, ‘You may not build a house for my name, for you are a man of war and have shed blood.’ 6 . . . ‘It is Solomon your son who shall build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father.’*

Oh, like I said, *beginning* with David’s son Solomon. For keep your eye on the “*house*” here, because, honestly, it’s going to move around like that ball and those little cups in that popular sleight-of-hand shell game.

“Solomon . . . shall build my house and my courts.” Clearly, that’s the *brick-and-mortar* house, as we say. That’s that magnificent House of the Lord, that great Temple, in

Jerusalem. The *ultimate* “*house made with human hands*” - tens of *thousands* of them: 30,000 forced laborers Solomon drafted out of Israel, “*70,000 burden-bearers and 80,000 stonecutters in the hill country,*” and 3,300 more “*chief officers who were over the work*” (1 Kings 5:13-16). The “*house*” that was seven years in the making (6:38). The “*house*” that David - while he was prohibited from being allowed to head its *building* committee *was* tapped to be the chairman of the *fundraising* effort - encouraging *others* to contribute to the cause of Solomon’s great “*house*” and *himself* donating 3,000 “*talents*” - more than 225,000 pounds, more than \$4.5 billion of today’s dollars - of *gold*, and 7,000 “*talents*” - or more than a half a million pounds or just over \$134 million dollars in today’s value - of *silver* (1 Chron. 29:2-5).

Okay, so that was *that* house. So what about that *other* house? In other words, enough about Solomon as the *house-builder*; we need to get back to Solomon as the house - the “*house*” the Lord is promising to build. For, frankly, it just doesn’t all add up. *Solomon* doesn’t add up. Not when I read you the *whole* quote from YHWH to Nathan to David to us: “*When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom . . . forever*” (2 Sam. 7:12). Not when we hear the last words of the Lord’s grand promise to David: “*And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever*” (2 Samuel 7:16).

Yes, not to move those cups around too quickly for you, but it’s that whole “*forever*” part, isn’t it? Solomon isn’t going to live *forever*. David, *either*. Not here on *earth*, at least. Not as King of Israel. And yet YHWH’s promise is clear: the rule of someone *after* David - someone from the “*house and lineage of David*” - *is* going to last forever. *His* kingdom - the “*house*” that will *begin* with David’s son Solomon - *is* going to last forever.

That's gonna' have to be *some* "house"! That's gonna' have to be *some* King! That's gonna' have to be *some* Son!

And indeed it is - great King David's *greater* Son: Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Mary and Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity from all eternity. Yes, lift up the shell on anyone *else*, and you'll find that cup *empty*. There won't be anything *there*, for no one else *qualifies*.

Only *Jesus*' kingdom will last forever. Only *Jesus* - how was it our lesson said it? - "*when he commits iniquity*" - "*if he commits iniquity*" is more accurate, for literally the original reads, "whom, if He transgresses" - will YHWH "*discipline [] with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men.*" Only *Jesus* will be "*wounded for our transgressions*" and "*bruised for our iniquities.*" Only "*with [Jesus'] stripes*" will we be "*healed*" (Is. 53:5). For only *Jesus* - "*who knew no sin*" - did "God . . . make [] to be sin . . . for our sake . . . so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

For all those reasons, only *Jesus* - *ultimately* - is this forever "*house*" that YHWH promises He will build for David. But is there still something that we can learn from this whole homebuilding fiasco, this whole building program controversy?

I'd suggest that it's the whole "I will make you a house" plan. Better said perhaps, it's the moral of the story of the whole "I will make you a house" plan. For if you ask *me*, *that's* what you heard all the way back in our sermon text: That God's way are higher. That God's ways are better. That what God has planned for His people - even when our plans are well-intended, for, let's be clear that there was nothing evil or self-serving about King David's "house" plan - is always better - always "higher," always "greater" - than what *we* have planned. Any time of the year. Even at Christmas.

Okay, then, so let's go ahead and talk about God's plans, shall we - His *Christmas* plans?

Oh, but let's wait until this *evening*, because, well, you know, for *now*, it's still *Advent*.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.