

Home?

A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church

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II Samuel 7:1-14

In the 1980s, Americans tuned their televisions every Thursday night to hear a familiar chorus:

Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got.
Taking a break from all your worries, sure would help a lot.

Wouldn't you like to get away?

Sometimes you want to go

Where everybody knows your name,
and they're always glad you came.
You wanna be where you can see,
our troubles are all the same
You wanna be where everybody knows
Your name.

The place was Cheers. Boston's most beloved pub, home to Sam, Woody, Diane, Cliff, Norm, Carla, Coach, and other lovable characters. Cheers was their sanctuary; a home, a resting place, an escape from a life of busy-ness. As Norm was fond of saying, "It's a dog-eat-dog world out there, and I'm wearing milk-bone underwear." But inside Cheers, life seemed a little easier. It was a home away from home, and for some, it was their only home.

Whether we're from Boston or Benson, Raleigh or Romania, every human being needs a place to call home – a place to rest from life's burdens and re-energize for the tasks of tomorrow. And in so many ways, our sense of belonging is tied up in our residence. We believe we need a physical address to make this happen.

In today's lection, we meet up with King David. And he's been busy, exhaustingly busy, for nearly two decades and twenty-one Chapters of First and Second Samuel. And he's been mobile. He's had no home. There is no rest for the weary.

Some years ago God had sent Samuel to find a new king – David was busy then too. As a matter of fact, he was so busy tending sheep he missed the lineup when Jesse gathered his sons. Samuel had to track him down before the anointing could begin. And David had been busy ever since.

Later on, and don't ask me to explain the chronology, David slew Goliath with sling and stone, befriended King Saul, and even soothed him by playing his harp. He occupied himself with tasks of faithful servanthood.

Even David's relationships were exhausting and time-consuming. Take King Saul for example.

Drama!!! More ups and downs than a Taylor Swift song. In fact, if Ms. Swift is seeking inspiration for her next album, she would find plenty of love/hate material in the stories about this pair.

But that's not all. Since his youth, David has been fighting and subduing the Philistines and other neighboring tribes – there are too many to count. All you need to know is that there are more Philistines and other hostile neighbors threatening David's territory than there are pigs in Duplin County...it's an infinite stream!

Oh, and by the way, David has spent the last seven years trying to unite the kingdoms, and when he finally does, he's got to invest his energy into building a capital city and establishing a government.

Every aspect of David's life is demanding.

Today's lection is in stark contrast to the story that precedes it. Up to this point in the Hebrew Bible, David's busy life mimics that of his ancestors: there have been no sustained periods of rest and security for the people of Israel – always nomadic, always warring with neighbors, always looking over their shoulder. David's life has been the next chapter of a restless people.

And then, without explanation, everything changes.

In the first verse, we learn God has granted David rest – some translations will say safety from his enemies. Either way, I think that's fascinating.

It's a three-day weekend, and David is relaxing.

Imagine the scene: David sits in a luxurious den, or perhaps a balcony that overlooks his newly-built city. His feet are propped up. A fancy cushion is behind his head. He's in a nice clean, soft robe. He swirls a glass of red wine (or Welch's) in his hand. Perhaps someone's playing soothing music in the background. He stretches, and calls to Nathan:

Isn't this something? Smell that fresh Lebanese cedar? Most expensive in the land, and worth every penny! And they say it really ups your resale value. I tell you what, Nathan, God is good!

And that's got me thinking, we ought to do something nice for God. Here I am sitting in this beautiful palace, and God's ark is resting in a tent. I mean that thing doesn't even have windows or doors or central heating and air! Poor thing. We've got to fix this.

Let me stop here for a moment.

If we had never met David, it would be very easy to only find arrogance in his statement. Who does he think he is, suggesting that he should build a house for God? What differentiates David from Pharaoh and other mighty rulers who built homes for God to stroke their own egos?

But we DO know David. We know he has served God well, and with devotion. And while his thoughts may be a bit misplaced, there is some sincerity and authenticity in them. He's finally resting.

For the first time in two decades, David is enjoying one of humanity's basic needs and desires: a house. In this place, he now has a tangible location to establish his safety, his ability to rest, and to claim his

residency. And like any of us, David is human. Part of his sense of belonging is tied to residing in a physical space. For David, and for us, home is a house of rest.

And so perhaps intoxicated by a chance to relax, and feeling a little bigger and more powerful than he ought to, David asks Nathan, "So what do you think? Should we build God a house?"

Nathan will eventually become a prophet who tells it like it is. But he doesn't here. Nathan tows the company line. "Go for it, Sire. The Lord is with you," he says.

But God has a way of speaking. And lucky for us, Nathan listened. No sooner than Nathan offers his opinion to David, than God gently, but firmly tells Nathan to remind David of who's really in charge.

Through a vision to Nathan, God says:

David, you presume to know what I need. You think I need a house. But here's the thing. Not only do I not need a house, I have never asked you to build me one. I go where my people go.

And David, remember your own history. I have gone where you have gone – I was with you in the fields, I was with you when your enemies pursued you, and I am with you right here and right now. I am with you always. I have made you a prince and the leader of my people.

David, you are not going to build me a house. I'm gonna build you a house. It's not a house of bricks and mortar, but rather it's a dynasty, a house of your lineage. It's a covenant. I'm making you a promise that yours will be a name of great renown. Your descendants will know rest – a land secure and sheltered from its enemies.

You understand a house to mean a physical place where one finds rest. But what I'm saying is that you and your people will find rest in the house that I build you: a royal line, undergirded in my covenant.

This passage is remarkable. It's world-changing. Here's why:

For its entire history, Israel had been a people who was restless. It was exhausted. And logically, David assumed that building a house would bring rest and peace to a weary people. And this being completed, he thought, let's offer God the same.

But, in denying David's offer to build God a home, and suggesting a counterproposal, God reveals a remarkable irony. As children of God, we find rest in God's presence. God makes a restless people restful. But God is different. God finds rest in being restless. God's rest is the relentless pursuit of those who need God's presence.

God offers David a wonderful grace. Because of your devotion, I am building you a house, a lasting rest; a house made not of cedar, but of my presence and blessings.

God, says to David, and to us as well, "I am who I will be."

And that is a God invested in creation, always moving and surrounding those who need me. My house is not a noun. My house is an action: it's being a home to my people, whenever, wherever, and whatever they are.

God says to David, and to us as well:

My house is not a building, but rather my house is a floating oasis of rest. It's any place where people seek and need my presence. My house has been in the hot deltas of Egypt as slaves endured the persecution of Egyptians. It has been in a tent that followed Israel in the Wilderness. It has been in fields that you tended. It will live among your people, and among your sons. And even long after the tangible signs of your kingdom remain, my house will live in expectant hope – hope realized in the life of a Galilean Peasant who proclaimed: 'my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

God says to David and to us as well:

I will dwell with those who wander. I will dwell in the conversations of Paul; I will ride on St. Ignatius' Donkey; I will follow the tracks of the Underground Railroad; I will still shine in the darkness of Auschwitz; I will swirl around the national mall when Brother Martin dreams loudly of the day when all of my children are free; I will float through cyber-space, surfing on the winds of every hashtag reminding my people that black lives and transgender lives and EVERY life matters. My home is my creation, my beloved, my people. And your home is my rest.

And most importantly, God's word to David informs us that God will even dwell in a people called Sardis Baptist Church.

Friends this morning, we sit in God's house. But God is not contained to this place. Even as we gather, God is restless, seeping and spilling into our community in more ways than we can conceive. God is finding a home in all things.

Our goal as a people is not to build God's house. Rather, it is to identify and celebrate the house that God builds in every heart, mind and spirit of God's created people. For as God permeates each person, the promise of rest soothes a world still lost in chaos.

Perhaps there will be days, when like our ancestors of old, our restlessness stirs us; our lives a carousel of never-ending anxiety and peace seems a far-off promise.

Today we're given assurance. God built a house for David. And all these years later, God is working restlessly to assure that house remains standing for us. We're invited to find the peace that comes with such a house. And should we choose to open the door, we'll find the place where God always knows our name and God is always glad we came.

Then again, God is restless. We don't necessarily have to go looking for this house. God may just build it right where we are. May it be so! Amen.