



From the Pulpit: August 28, 2022

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Reverend Christine V. Hides

1 Kings 5–8; 2 Chronicles 2–8

Then and Now—God in Unknown Places and Experiences, VI: The Ark and the Temple

When God's people arrived in the Promised Land, eventually David became king and David gathered people from the north and south, and one kingdom. King David took the city of Jerusalem and began to call it the City of David. The people lived and dwelled there, but there was something missing, and it was the ark.

David sent his arm to go and get the ark and bring it to Jerusalem. When ark came through the great gate of the city David danced before it and they put the tent of meeting over it as they had done when they traveled through the desert and through the wilderness.

Now King David wanted to build a house for God but God said no. David was a man of war and so God said that it would be his son Solomon that built the house.

When Solomon became king, he began construction of the temple, and everyone had to help build it. Workers were sent to Lebanon to cut down huge cypress trees and others were sent to the mountains to quarry the stone. The temple began to grow and grow and grow. Inside of the temple they made the holy of holies an inner sanctuary, where only the priests would go on the high holy day, the day of atonement, once per year.

As they had done in the desert, they used the same things they had used in the wilderness to come close God. They had the incense burner so that fragrant smoke could rise, and the branched lamp stand, and the table with bread

for each of the twelve tribes. They also had a basin of water for washing, much bigger than the one they carried through the desert, and an altar.

When the priest brought the ark into the finished temple and into the holy of holies a divine light glowed because

God's presence was there. Solomon dedicated the temple to God in prayer. He said "God is there no one in heaven above or the earth below like you. God you are faithful. God your love never ends. How can we contain you in this house God? May this temple be a place of justice and prayer."

Solomon ruled a long time and was known for his wisdom. Some say he might have been the wisest person in the world. David, his father was also famous known for war and his songs.

Thanks be to God and God's holy word. Amen.

"When we come into our sacred spaces, like this church building, beauty points us to God's presence.... God is not just here in this beautiful place, but everywhere."

The young people in this room know something the adults may not—this way of telling stories in the sand, and with beautiful objects, that invite us to wonder about God together is called Godly Play. Godly Play is our core curriculum for preschool–second grade. The young people know that if you hear the story for the first time or the 100th time, a new insight or connection will emerge. Our Sunday school leaders know that this is a way for the stories of the people of God to live in your heart.

When you know the Godly Play stories, the words come to mind often, and invite you to wonder in a new way. This is why Katie and I chose to share Godly Play stories with you in this August sermon series on finding God in the Unknown and the Unexpected. You can follow along with me today if you listen for: 2 kings, a desert, a house, a question, and a prophet.

“The desert is a wild and dangerous place. People don’t go into the desert unless they have to.”¹

Once you’ve heard the stories of the people in the wilderness, the stories of Abraham and Sarah, of Moses and Miriam, you won’t be able to take a wilderness trip without recalling these words. I learned this hiking with my family, a little bit lost and running low on water hiking through the desert of Arches National Park.

Most of us will enter the desert at some point, or the metaphorical wilderness of pain or loss. There are more refugees today than there have been in human history. Some of us will undergo a migration. Others of us will befriend an immigrant neighbor. And if you’ve heard these sacred stories, when you come through the wilderness to the places of welcome and safety, to the holy spaces, church buildings, and forest cathedrals, you might remember these words “I was glad when they said unto me...let us go to the house of the Lord.”

Maybe you’ve been to Jerusalem, to the place where the temple was built. If you go there today, you will see the foundations of the second temple, the one that was rebuilt after Solomon’s temple was destroyed. The second temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. At this place now is the Dome of the Rock, a mosque. This place is sacred to Jews, Muslims, and Christians.

“This is God’s house, and God is here today.” In our sanctuary you’ll see reminders of this ancient temple in the architecture and the furnishings. Kids, look around with your eyes and see if you can find the cherubim or angel carvings that might remind us of God’s throne on top of the ark. Notice that we also have candles to prepare to come close to God in this space. There are other reminders, too. After worship, come and tell me the things you saw in our church that reminded you of the temple.

“We care for God’s
Creation. Everyone
belongs. Everyone
has what they need.
That’s a pretty good
definition of
‘doing justice.’”

We’ve been traveling through the stories of Genesis and Exodus in the Old Testament during August. In this ancient texts, God’s people traveled out of slavery and into freedom. It took a long time in the desert to get to a land where they could grow food and find water. And it took a long time for the kingdoms to be united by King David. And when David wanted to build a temple, a house for God, God said, “no your son Solomon will build it.” You will find part of this story in the book of

1 Kings. When it was finished, King Solomon prayed a long prayer that said two important things.

First, Solomon prayed, “There is nothing greater than God in heaven above or on earth below. God, you are faithful. God you are here. Since you are so great, how could this house we’ve built for you contain you?”

When we come into our sacred spaces, like this church building, beauty points us to God’s presence. But God isn’t only here. God is everywhere and always with us. God is with us in the work meeting, and the classroom, the carpool lane, and the lunch with friends. God is with us on the court, in the pool, on the field, and on the golf course. Solomon remembered what his ancestors Abraham and Sarah learned, “all of God is in every place.”² As you begin this school year, pay attention to joy, love, peace, and life and you will remember something that is easy to forget: God is not just here in this beautiful place, but everywhere.

¹ Berryman, Jerome, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 2*, New York: Church Publishing, 2017.

² Ibid.

Solomon also said that God will listen to the prayers of the people in this temple and it will be a place of justice. Throughout the Bible God's justice is measured by how well the vulnerable are cared for in community and also by the morals and ethics we live by.

A few years ago a friend and her daughter, who went to a school a lot like some of yours, noticed that a few of the kids received their lunches from school in a paper bag.

Making sure every child has lunch is a good and just thing! But my friend and her daughter noticed something else. They noticed that *only* the kids who got their lunch from school had paper bag lunches. Everyone else had a reusable lunch box that they got to pick out from the store.

So the kids with paper bags felt different and a little left out. My friend and her daughter who noticed this, quietly got a bunch of cool lunch boxes, and let the kids who received lunches in paper bags choose one for themselves. That way everyone had lunch, everyone belonged, and the school produced less trash.

We care for God's Creation. Everyone belongs. Everyone has what they need. That's a pretty good definition of "doing justice."

It wasn't always clear to people in King Solomon's time long ago or to us now how we are to love God and love our neighbors. But prophets are people who come so close to God and God comes so close to them that they know what to do.

Micah was a prophet living when Solomon's temple was still standing. He told the people that what God wants most isn't fancy symbols and offerings. "What does the Lord require?" is the question people ask. And Micah told them the answer, the words that I hope you will carry with you wherever you go, "do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God." (Micah 6:8)

In a moment, we will bless all of our students, parents, and teachers as we go back to school. We will bless the forty people who are going to help our youth learn and grow in Sunday school this year. Students and teachers, we have a sticker for you to put on your laptop or water bottle. As you go to your schools and your workplaces. When you walk in the wilderness places, and in the holy sacred spaces, God is there.

"When you wonder
what to do and how
to act at school,
at home, and at
work, I pray that
the prophet's words
dwell in your hearts
and rise to your
lips, 'Do justice,
love kindness, walk
humbly with God.'"

When you wonder what to do and how to act at school, at home, and at work, I pray that the prophet's words dwell in your hearts and rise to your lips, "Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God."

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—Prayers of the People—
The Reverend Dr. Katie Snipes Lancaster

Holy one, Architect of Daybreak,
who awakens us from the “mansions of the stars”
(Diane Ackerman, from poem “School Prayer”),
the celestial melody of rest still ringing in our ears;
give us daybreak;
give us early light;
give us delight at the simplicity of breath in our lungs
and heartbeat in our ribcage;
give us another day in which
our praise is heard and received.

Lift the veil between us and all that is holy here:
for “everything is holy now/Everything, everything/
Everything is holy now”
(Peter Mayer, from poem “Holy Now”).

Make sacred the crescendo of late August
with book bags filled with gratitude,
lunch boxes, and anticipation;
make sacred squeaky playground swings
filled with children and nannies pushing strollers,
reminders that the churn of life remains constant change
and all the while life remains cyclical, unchanged.

Enter into us, spirit of the living God,
when daybreak turns raw,
when the struggle of daily life engulfs,
when our hearts are guarded because of last
year’s trauma,
last month’s upheaval,
last week’s distress.

For the grief we carry,
for the pain in our bodies,
for the worry we bear
as loved ones make their way through impossibility,
for the ache of longing for another path.

Be with us, Light of Life.
Be with us, and move within us.

We pray, too, for the world:
for places of war and violence, near and far;
for the national divisions and the theater of politics;
for Russia and Ukraine at war seemingly without end;
for those who endure dictatorship and abuse of power;
for our oceans and global ecosystems
at risk of more than our minds can even bear.

Bear it all, O God.
Bear us up, O God.
Change our hearts and minds.
Shift us toward compassion,
for the sake of your kingdom at work in the world.

And hear us as we pray as you teach us to pray, saying...

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