

“Wherever You Are”
2 Samuel 7:1-14a

A couple of years ago I got a special gift from my daughter on Mother’s Day. It is a mug that says on it: “Home Is Where the Mom Is.” That really touched my heart. That mug is still my favorite. So what makes a place home for us? How significant is it for us to have a place we call home? According to the recent housing crisis, home is where the mortgage is. What constitutes a home for you?

I know from personal experience from living in different parts of the world and even in this country, home is an ever changing concept. For many years I thought I knew where my home was. Home used to be the place where I grew up; later it became the place where I rested my head at night. Home later became the place where I got my bills. After I got married, it became the life I shared with my husband. My physical home was for a while in Syria, later it became Kentucky, a few years later it became Alaska, then Oregon, and now New York. But deep down now I know that home for me is about being in the presence of God. It is not about being in one place at one time. The illusion of thinking that my home is outside of God is starting to erode because I am finding more comfort in living in the presence of God. This is not just because I am a minister and of course should say such a holy thing. I truly believe this is the wisdom that all of us end up discovering on our journey of faith.

Today’s Bible story is an affirmation of this wisdom of faith. After David becomes a king and establishes the city of Jerusalem to be his center of power, his capital, he builds a house of cedar. Back then and even until now cedar was not a common building material. In Jerusalem and the Middle East, houses and palaces were made out of stone because trees were not plentiful in that part of the world. So, for David to import cedar from Lebanon to build his house was a sign of great wealth and power. The cedar trees of Lebanon are famous in the Bible. Also, the brown wood of the cedar was very useful. It burnt without smoke and left only a few ashes. Its fragrant resin was known as cedar oil which people used for preserving cloth and parchment. Cedar wood was also used in the purification of a leper (Lev. 14). It was used in buildings, especially later by Solomon, David’s son, to build the temple in Jerusalem and then later on for the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 3:7). As David built his house out of this expensive wood, he felt guilty about having God’s presence in the Ark of the Covenant be only in a tent. He saw that it did not look really good in front of people that he would have a cedar house while the Ark of the Covenant, the chest that contained God’s commandments, would just sit in a tent. There was a time in Israel’s history when people sojourned and did not have permanent homes. This was during the exodus experience after they left Egypt and wandered in the desert for 40 years. Back then, it was okay to have God’s presence as it was symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant to be in a tent. But this was a different time. This was a time when people had settled into homes and God needed to be honored with a home as David thought. But as David shares his plan with Nathan the prophet, God challenges David’s thinking. God turns the tables on David and uses, of all things, a pun to do so, using “house” to mean more than one thing. The Hebrew word that is used is *Bayith*, which is the word for “house,” occurs seven times in this passage. *Bayith* also may be understood as “palace,” “temple,” or “dynasty.” These wider meanings enrich the significance of “house” in this passage. David desires to construct a permanent place for God. Instead, God reminds David that God has been the people’s “place” wherever they have been. God promises David a place through an ongoing house, or dynasty. So, in essence God says to David, you are not to build me a house because I am the one who builds you and your people a house. Until the people understand this lesson, no temple is built. This was a hard message for the people of Israel because they, as many of us, would like to find a specific place where they knew to find God. As human beings we often find ourselves

tempted to reduce the presence of God to our own thoughts, experiences and even spaces. In his book *The Christian Life*, Michael Lindvall shares that, "As a minister, I am occasionally invited to offer what is usually labeled 'the invocation' at assorted community events. I accept these invitations most of the time, but if I'm in a frisky mood, I preface my 'yes' with a picky little aside about that word 'invocation.' I just may say, 'I'd love to offer an opening prayer, but I don't do invocations.' That usually elicits silence from the other end of the phone line. Sometimes the more curious will pursue the matter. 'Why not invocations?' This offers me my in. 'Because,' I answer, 'from what little I know about God, God cannot much be invoked. Certainly no words I might mumble could ever invoke the presence of the eternal God. But don't worry, God will be at the meeting no matter what. I'll be glad to pray, I'll just pray that we might somehow see the Holy Presence that will be there, invocation or no.'"

It is impossible for us to speak or know of God's home. What we do know is that God is our home. Our faith journey is about learning to be in that home. Our home is in God. Imagine that for a moment. What does your home in God look like? Do you know that this is truly your home or do you spend a lot of time in the illusion that your home is somewhere else? Are you rested right now in your life knowing that you live in the house of God or are you always searching for the thing that will bring you satisfaction?

There is a great children's book by Margaret Wise Brown called *The Runaway Bunny*. It is the story of a little bunny who dreams about running away from home, only to find "home" wherever he ends up. His mommy does not tell him to stop, instead she tells him about all the ways that she will be with him. If he becomes a fish, she becomes the fisherman who will fish him out. If he becomes a bird, she is the tree in which he nests. If he becomes a sailboat, she becomes the wind that blows his sail. Finally, Bunny gets the point. "Shucks!" he says, "I might just as well stay home and be your little bunny."

Anthony De Mello tells the story about a tourist from the States who visited the famous Polish rabbi Hafez Hayyim. He was astonished to see that the rabbi's home was only a simple room filled with books. The only furniture was a table and a bench. "Rabbi, where is your furniture?" asked the tourist. "Where is yours?" replied Hafez. "Mine? But I'm only a visitor here." "So am I," said the rabbi.

We live in God's house all of our lives. This is where we come from, this is where we live on this earth and this is where we go when we die. True wisdom in our lives comes from knowing that and living our lives aware of what truly matters. Imagine what your life would feel and look like if every morning you woke up with that great sense of living in the heart of God's presence. Your circumstances may not change around you, but your awareness but you would never be the same. We tend to think of God's house being right here in church and hence we put God in a box. This is indeed a big box, but still a box. The church building is a place that helps us come together to worship, grow and serve but it does not limit God's presence to one spot or one hour. But even in church, during worship, many times we act as if God is not truly present. In his book, *The Trivialization of God*, Don McCullough says this about worship, "Visit a church a Sunday morning –almost any will do-and you will likely find a congregation comfortably relating to a Deity who fits nicely within precise doctrinal positions, or who lends almighty support to social crusades, or who conforms to individual spiritual experiences. But you will not likely find much awe or a sense of mystery. The only sweaty palms will be those of the preacher unsure whether the sermon will go over; the only shaking knees will be those of the soloist about to sing the offertory."

I invite you today to spend some time with the idea of God being your home, wherever you are. Maybe your life would like and feel exactly the same way because you already know and live

this truth. But at the off chance that you are anything like me, I invite you to review your life's dealings such as your material possessions, health concerns, career questions, end of life fears, and relationship joys or concerns. But this review is not for the purpose of making a list of joys or concerns but as a way to hold all these things in the presence of God. How would you see things? People who have near death experiences or struggle with a serious illness see things differently after those experiences. They don't live life the same way they lived it before because their eyes have been opened to the reality of being in the presence of God. When you know that your home is in God, your priorities change, your struggles change, in fact, everything in life begins to change. Cynthia Bourgeault tells this story in her book, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, "When I met him, Hank was one of those exuberant, restless souls, sixty-one going on thirty, filled with life and passion. A member of the distinguished Taft clan that has contributed to American history a president and a pioneering educator, he bounced around in a variety of careers...He'd rowed the entire Maine coast in a twelve-foot Peapod and was now making a fine debut as an author and a cruising sailor. 'Stunned' was the response of virtually everyone who knew him when we learned that Hank had contracted pancreatic cancer. And Hank himself was no less stunned, but he quickly regrouped...his first response was to give it the 'old Yale try,' taking command of his treatment program with the same panache as if planning a transatlantic cruise. The pieces involved an eclectic blend of physical workouts, diet, light chemotherapy, and ...visualization meditation for an hour each morning. I remember the day very clearly: February 4, 1991. The sun was rising over the islands of Penobscot Bay...as we sat overlooking the cold, brilliant ocean...somehow...we all shared our uneasiness about making passages in zero-visibility conditions. 'But there is a lot of ways to keep busy so you don't feel your fear,' Hank observed cheerfully. 'You can keep precise time checks and enter them in the log. You can stand out on the bow and every minute do a 360-degree scan of the waters... 'Yes,' I said and then, volunteering some of my own work-in-progress on the subject of fog passages, 'or else you can just let the fear come up and fall through it to the other side.' He looked at me as if I'd pierced him with a sword...Over the next few weeks Hank became decidedly more inward. He quickly gave up the visualization and the lumberjack breakfasts, then the workouts and chemotherapy. He gathered his family, made his final reconciliations, settled his affairs, and waited...Hank had never been a religious man... but in the those final weeks a change so extraordinary came over him that none of us could fail to notice it. As his physical body withered, his soul grew large and luminous...He faced his death with open heart, utterly trusting and utterly serene. Three days before the end...his last words to me...:'Are you fearless yet?' 'Not yet, Hank,' I said. 'I am trying.' 'Fall...fearless...into love.'" He said.

Hank found his true home in God's love. The choice is before us every day. Do we fall fearless into God's love? Or do we live in the illusion of building a house for God? Amen.