

August 8, 2021
“A Dwelling Place for God”
2 Samuel 7:1-14a, Ephesians 2:17-22
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Good morning, friends! It is so good to see you again. I can't tell you how much I have missed you and how grateful I am to be able to join you again at times. I thank Tim for that, for giving me the joy of seeing your faces, of hearing your voices, of hearing the choir, of sharing again in community with you.

I do want to warn you that this is the first time I have preached on zoom, in front of a little screen, without live bodies present, which is an event completely different from any preaching event in my entire career, so I want to apologize in advance for any newbie mistakes I make. If I accidentally mute myself in the middle of preaching or turn off my video or some other faux pas, please forgive me. For me, no matter how much I embarrass myself, it is worth it to be with you.

So, I want to share with you the way a friend begins the day, each day, and has every day for years—it's with a prayer, although many would not recognize it as a prayer. He never asks for anything and never mentions the word “God.” What he does is simply sit with a cup of coffee in his hands, sniffs it, then closes his eyes. He pictures the lands where the coffee is grown, the fruit on the shrubs, the sun and rain that nourish them, and he says, “Thank you.” He pictures the workers who tend the shrubs and harvest the fruit, those who process the fruit and dry the beans, and he says, “Thank you.” Before he heard of Fair Trade options, he would remember each morning the exploitation involved in many places through large businesses or a wealthy few who owned the land and made the profits, with the poor doing the work and struggling to barely get by, and he would limit himself to one cup of coffee. Now he drinks Fair Trade coffee, remembers the small farmers who are committed to cooperative efforts, who have grown and picked and dried the coffee, and he says, “Thank you.” He pictures dock workers and ships that transport the beans, and says, “Thank you,” and the plants that roast the beans and says, “Thank you.” He pictures the co-op where he buys the beans, the people who put them on the shelf, the checkers he pays for them, and he says, “Thank you.” He remembers the water he needs to make the coffee and pictures rain

and then a worker from the water company, after which he says, "Thank you." He remembers the electricity needed to run his coffee maker and pictures the wind-driven turbines that generate it and a worker from the electric company, and he says, "Thank you." After all of that, he finally takes a sip of the coffee, aware again of how intimately connected is the world, awed by how many of those connections, how much giving, go into one cup of coffee, and he's grateful for such connectedness and, in particular, how his life is blessed by it.

His simple morning prayer, his daily exercise of remembering all of life woven together, remembering the presence and grace of a Spirit doing the weaving, flows from a profound sense of connectedness, which is the same ground from which the passage from Ephesians arises. Having once experienced the world as deeply divided, separated by a wall of difference between my group and others, a wall that generated hostility and led people to experience each other, at best, as strangers and aliens, the author of Ephesians now experiences, in the community of Christ, a connection so profound he calls it a new humanity, where those who seemed separate are now brought together – "reconciled" is the word he uses – are members of one household, are joined together in one community . . . which he calls a temple, a dwelling place for God, the God of connection, the God who is surely present because the Spirit, like a thread, now weaves them together. I could almost see the author of Ephesians, like my friend, picturing those he once sensed no connection to, once saw as *them*, picturing them now as *us*, family, together, and saying, "Thank you." That passage flows from a profound sense of connectedness.

While the other story we read begins in a very different experience, far from any sense of connectedness, far from gratitude. The story begins, instead, in arrogance, as David, king of Judea, the same David who will later impregnate his neighbor's wife and organize a conspiracy to cover up the affair by having her husband killed, as that same David now decides that *he* will build a house for God, that he will erect, finally, a temple where God can dwell. David thinks that he, *David*, is the center of power and importance, that *he* calls the shots, that he alone has been the one who has determined how things have turned out and that he alone will continue to determine

things, even for God. David's arrogance is one convinced that he lives by his own power and succeeds by his own efforts alone, which means he is oblivious to the connections that give him life, to the gifts that have made him, oblivious, that is, until the prophet puts him in his place. "God will build *you* a house," Nathan tells him with a double twist. Not only is the power not David's (twist number one), but the *house* is not a building (twist number two) – it is family, the connections that truly give any of us a place.

Behind both of those passages is the same profound truth – that we live by our connections, that we belong to each other, that we are dependent on each other and routinely blessed in receiving from each other, that we live by the gift of each other and the gifts we receive from each other. Behind both passages is the same profound truth, but it is a truth far from the truths that routinely drive our world, a world that is too often divided, too often pits our interests' over against each other and encourages us to pursue our interests regardless of the cost to others, like the hoarding of vaccinations in our country, even to the point of expiration, while so many in the world are desperate for them; a world that tells us that what we want, like easy, unrestricted access to guns, is worth the cost of lives, so many lives, on our streets; a world that tells us that what we have is ours to do anything we want with, like spending billions on personal space travel experience despite the wrenching poverty of so many; a world that tells us it is our right to believe whatever the hell we want no matter how untrue and no matter the consequences, like January 6th and a 4th Covid surge. We are encouraged to consider our interests and desires and beliefs alone, as if our bonds to each other, to every other, to all life, do not exist or do not matter, as if there were no truth to the spiritual insight of our belonging.

And yet, that insight is profoundly true. We experience that truth negatively at times, like recently when we were stunned, moved, by the lives lost in the collapse of the Miami Surfside condominium and those lost or destroyed by swift, destructive floods in Germany and Belgium. We experience the truth negatively at times, like the shudder we felt as our economy and supply chains stumbled early in the pandemic, the interdependence of international markets, even when faltering, a hint of our deep,

deep interdependence on each other. We experience the truth negatively at times, as in more and more extreme storms and raging wildfires, the rising planetary temperatures a hint of the interconnectedness of a planet that cannot escape our self-indulgence.

We experience the truth negatively at times, but the truth itself is a positive one, of our deep, deep connectedness, of our belonging to each other, of the grace of such ties. Over the years I was at Calvary so many former members who moved away would return for a visit and tell of that grace, the life-giving richness, of the community of Calvary that even from a distance of miles and years continued to bless them, and I have to say that I now truly understand and experience that. I remember, though, one particular description of that richness from years ago. Ruth Horwald, a former Swiss intern at Calvary who returned for a visit, told us that the community she experienced at Calvary was the only real community she'd known in her life, and that even twenty years later she still dreamt of it and was blessed by it and ached for it, and then she said something I will never forget: though she spent only two years at Calvary and a lifetime in Switzerland, she thought of Calvary as home and Switzerland as the place she was visiting.

Why? Because at Calvary she experienced the truth, the deepest truth of all of us, that we belong to each other, that our lives are woven together to bless and be blessed by each other. "Reconciled in one body," Ephesians put it, "built together spiritually as a dwelling place for God." That's our truth, the one you experience in the community you share with each other, in the strength you receive from each other and in the comfort you give each other, the one you experience in the hope you encourage in each other, in the tears and joy you share with one another. That's our truth, that we belong to each other, woven together by the Spirit of God.

It's the truth we are invited to see in something as large as global climate change and in something as small as a cup of coffee, invited to see because it is our most profound truth, our most profound gift, that the dwelling place of God is among us, *between us*, giving us to each other, to all others, to all life, that we are woven into one body, a dwelling place for God.

It is our deepest truth, which leaves me with only one thing, finally, to say: Thank you.
Thank you. O wondrous God, thank you.

Amen.