

The House that Endures Forever

2 Samuel 7:1-17

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North Decatur Presbyterian Church

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Now when [King David] was settled in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him,² the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.”³ Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind, 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: Are you the one to build me a house to live 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 and a tabernacle.⁷ Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders, whom I commanded to shepherd my people, saying, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’⁸ Now therefore you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to 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 live in their own place and be disturbed no more, and evildoers shall afflict them no more, ...and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish their kingdom.¹³ They shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of their kingdom forever.¹⁴ I will be a parent to them, and they shall be a child to me. When they commits iniquity, I will punish them with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings.¹⁵ But I will not take^[b] my steadfast love from them, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me;^[c] your throne shall be established forever.”¹⁷ In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

Y'all, sometimes I get so frustrated with the Bible. Here we are, just a group of regular people with lots going on in our lives—work and family, and illness and struggle, and we've gotta get the Halloween decorations up and get the oil changed, and omigod this election. We just want to sit down and read the Bible and find something simple, clear ,and uplifting.

And instead of simple, clear, and uplifting, we get the David story. The story of King David and the Covenant God makes with David is not simple, it's not clear, and I'll let you decide it it's uplifting. But maybe we should be grateful, that when it comes to discussing the role of God in politics and power that the Bible is not simple. Understanding how God works through human rulers takes work on our part, it takes some wisdom on our part.

Understanding how God still works through human rulers requires we pay more than superficial attention to the scripture.

I'm not going to assume that you all remember the story of David. I'll tell it first, in brief. David, as you probably know, was the “greatest” king in Israel’s history. David began as a nothing, a nobody. A kid growing up on a farm following the sheep around. The hand of fate—the hand of God—plucks this kid from the pasture. And in the moment of his people’s

greatest need—when they are on the battlefield facing the existential crisis of military defeat at the hands of the invading Philistines and their powerful warrior, Goliath, David walks onto the battlefield and pulls out his slingshot and <thwack!> kills Goliath dead. David is thrust into the public spotlight—but the story tells us he is ready—and he loves God. It would have been enough for David to just have defeated Goliath. But David rises to become a leader of his people, on the battlefield, but also as an organizer, an inspirer, a source of strength. He overcomes the jealousy and hatred of Saul, Israel's first king. David defeats Saul and mobilizes the fractured tribes and unites them together. He founds a capital at Jerusalem, where he brings the Ark of the Covenant containing the 10 Commandments. David's a poet; he's musician, a folk-rocker who jams with the people, dances naked. He's full of life—full of flaws. He's a questionable father, he fails to avenge his daughter's rape; he's an abuser of women, an abuser of power.

When I read the David story, the message that comes out for me is this: we, the people, long for a good king. And there is no good king.

is this powerful hope that bubbles up from the people and it runs throughout the Scriptures—Old Testament and New. The hope is that God will establish among us a ruler who is good. We, the people, are fragile. We are vulnerable. We're afraid. We're afraid of the Philistines. Or Egypt. Or China. Afraid of foreigners. And we can't seem to organize our own lives—we can't keep the peace among ourselves, we can't keep from splintering off from one another. And we, the people, imagine a better world. A world in which we have security—we feel safe from our enemies. We imagine a world that is just and peaceful and prosperous. But we don't know how to make that world ourselves. So we ask God: "send us a ruler!"

This hope—for a ruler who will save us—is crowned here in this passage, in the figure of David. Here, God makes a Covenant with David

You remember what a covenant is. It's a promise. God initiates it. God says, "I will be your God. I will love you. I will sustain you. I will listen when you speak to me. I will shelter you in trouble. I will come to your aid when you need help. I will be God." The second part of the covenant is where we respond. In response to God's love and care, we accept responsibility for ourselves and for one another. We respond to God, "We will live the lives you created us to live. We will live by the law of love. We will care for one another. We will not lie or cheat or steal. We will show mercy. We will seek peace. We will share what we have with those who have less. We will be your people, God."

The Biblical dream is that God will send us a ruler who understands this covenant, who keeps this covenant in front of them. Who obeys this covenant. We dream of a leader who models justice, kindness, mercy, peace. The Bible tells us how this kind of leader acts. Read Psalm 72.

For the leader delivers the needy when they call,

the poor and those who have no helper.

13 The leader has pity on the weak
and saves the lives of those in need.

14 From oppression and violence the leader redeems their life,
and precious are they in the leader's eyes.

It's so old, this hope for God to send us a political leader to "save us." Our spiritual ancestors in the Holy Land longer for such a leader. We still do.

But here's where the Biblical story gets complicated. Here's where you really have to pay attention. The Bible seems to suggest that a political leader who can deliver on all of our hopes has never existed—and never will. Even in the lead-up to the crowning of King David, there are voices that speak up that say, "be careful with your hopes for a ruler to save you. Rulers always fail, because they are people and people always fail. Rulers will be greedy. They abuse their power. They think too highly of themselves. They put their needs before those of the people."

The Bible shows us those voices of caution, of warning, were right. Saul fails. David fails. Solomon fails. No ruler saves the people.

Yet, the same hope—the same dream—persists. That one day, God will send someone to us, to make all things right—to make our nation great again.

In the earliest days of the Jesus revolution, the people who knew Jesus best and told stories about him, and the people who wrote down those stories into what we now know as "gospels," said a peculiar thing about Jesus. They said, "Jesus is the Messiah." They meant that Jesus is the Davidic King. The one God sent. The anointed ruler sent by God. All of the gospel writers believed this. They called Jesus "son of David," they said, "blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!" They said Jesus was born in Bethlehem, because he was "of the house and lineage of David." They said he was "the king of the Jews."

For the earliest followers of Jesus, this ancient hope of a king who will save the people is placed in Jesus. That's a little weird, right? Because let's be honest, Jesus was the worst king ever. He never had a throne. He governed no territory. He never even had a single military victory—he actually renounced violence. Jesus was a king who was literally put to death by another king. This is our messiah, once and for all.

The earliest Christians re-imagined this whole ancient hope for a ruler who would save us. They re-imagined this eternal covenant God makes with David. That covenant is still in effect—but it's not with a nation, it's not even with a particular ruler. They said that love and justice, good news for the poor, release of captives, healing and mending and reconciling people to one another, binding up of broken hearts, and safety—true safety... they said all of this is possible if people yield our lives to the life of the crucified and risen Jesus.

We human beings have always hoped that God would send a ruler to be our savior. Someone strong and brave who “delivers us from our enemies.” It’s a fever dream. It’s a false hope.

Jesus exposes the falsehood in the idea that any king or president will be sent to save us.

He also shows us the truth: that our salvation does not come from our political rulers, but it comes from our fidelity to a Jesus-shaped a way of life—the way of humility, compassion for our neighbor, faith in God, sacrificial love, radical generosity, and justice for all. God is not glorified in someone who rules over the people; God is glorified in the one who bends to wash others’ feet. God is glorified in our life *together*, in our right relationships with one another. That life together is the house that God builds which can never be destroyed. That is the house will endures forever.

Benediction:

It is time to take leave of this place,
a house built for the people of God,
a place where generations of folk
have come to find God.
And yet we cannot keep God
contained within these walls.
We take God with us in our daily lives,
wherever we go God is there.
As we journey this week
let God be visible in our lives
so others might see God too.