

Text: II Samuel 7  
Title: Building Houses  
Date: 12.18.11  
Roger Allen Nelson

Country music singer Miranda Lambert sings my wife's current favorite song. I know it gets played a lot at our house. The song is about a young woman going back to the house in which she grew up and asking the current owner if she could just come in and look around and remember who she is. Listen to these lyrics:

*You leave home and you move on and you do the best you can  
I got lost in this old world and forgot who I am*

*I thought if I could touch this place or feel it  
This brokenness inside me might start healing  
Out here it's like I'm someone else  
I thought that maybe I could find myself*

*If I could walk around I swear I'll leave  
Won't take nothing but a memory  
From the house that built me.*

It is a beautiful song. Underneath it is the recognition that physical spaces shape us. And, at least in this country song, home is that place where we find our true selves. I know that for Sandi, my wife, it taps into her desire to visit her childhood home, but it also gets at what she builds for us.

Sandi is a wonderfully gifted homemaker who is constantly creating a unique eclectic warm home. Sometimes I think she would rather putter around the house than do anything else and we could insulate the whole house with her mountains of decorating magazines. But, I love the house that Sandi built ~ that builds me. One surprise of being on sabbatical last year was even with more time to travel there was something in me that just wanted to be home ~ not go anywhere else.

Now, it is true that some homes are haunted with painful memories. There are some houses that we run from, but at least for this morning let's consider home as that place where we're at peace, where we're healed, where we're our true selves.

Where do you find a sense of home and self?  
What house shaped you?  
Where would you go to find what built you?

Building houses is at the heart of this morning's text.  
The narrative context is not to be missed.

The first seven chapters of II Samuel are full of bloody battles, back room deals, and palace intrigue as David struggles with the house of Saul for control of Israel. There are brutal murders and messy mutilations; there are beheadings and betrothals; it is not for the squeamish or the

faint of heart. Eventually David conquers the Jebusites, defeats the Philistines, and lays claim to Jerusalem and all of the Promised Land. The whole thing, quite frankly, is a dramatic violent mess that culminates with David dancing half naked in front of the Ark of God as it is paraded into Jerusalem.

So.....

After all of that....

Chapter Seven opens with David lounging at home. It reads like the beginning of a fable. "Now when the king was settled in his palace...." With an opening like that you know there must be trouble brewing. You know that he will soon be unsettled by trolls, or Voldemort, or beautiful bathing women, or God.

He is living in a lavish palace.

He has taken multiple wives, many concubines, and has a slew of children.

He is top o' the heap, rags to riches, poor shepherd boy to a reigning king.

He has his feet on the royal footstool and a crown on his head.

He looks out his window and sees God in a box in a tent....

There is a delightful juxtaposition here. David surveys his kingdom from the power of the palace penthouse and he is reminded that God is tucked away in a tent out back.

The Israelites believed, in some fashion, that the presence of God dwelt in the Ark of the Covenant ~ the Ark that they carried while wandering in the wilderness.

They were a nomadic people, a people without a land and without a king.

They lived on the promises and presence of a God who traveled with them.

They trusted in a God who led them out of slavery and provided for them in the desert.

They knew God to be present in the mighty acts that secured their freedom.

They had received from God commandments carved in stone tablets and covenant promises carved in their bodies.

They lived with a God who demanded fidelity....

And yet, they wanted to be like other nations. They wanted kings and a kingdom; they wanted land and power and stability. They wanted a gated community.

Patriarchs and priests weren't enough. They wanted to be more than a tribe; they wanted to be a nation/state. And, eventually God relents. God gives in, or changes his mind, or...

So, it dawns on David ~ King of Israel ~ that God must surely need a temple at least as splendid as a king's palace. There is no way of knowing from the text if that awareness was rooted in pride or piety. But, it's God's response that's intriguing. It is hard to tell if God is amused or indignant. To paraphrase:

*I haven't been living in a house ...*

*Did I ever say build me a house?*

*I've been roaming about with you all along, taking care of you....*

*You think I need a house?*

At best there is a wonderful spirit of rhetorical bemusement, but then there is a dramatic turn. With a play between house as temple and house as the line of David, God says that if there is going to be any building ~ God will be the one doing it. God seems to acquiesce on the building of a temple. He goes from asserting that there is no need for a temple, to the promise that David's son will be the one to build the house for God. And, God will build a house for David. All of this is a promise of Divine activity that ends with:

*Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me;  
your throne will be established forever.*

Now, I guess you could simply see this as foreshadowing Solomon eventually building the temple with slave labor and clear cut trees. And, I guess it could simply be the promise that David's descendents will be the royal line for Israel. But, we see in it the promise of an eternal sovereign reign realized in Jesus Christ ~ born of the line of David.

I want to come back to Miranda Lambert in a minute, but there is in scripture this mysterious movement from pre-existent eternal God...

- to looking for Adam and Eve in the garden,
- to making promises to Abraham and Sarah,
- to talking from a burning bush,
- to showing his back side,
- to living in a box that is lugged around in the wilderness,
- to being manifest in a temple,
- to working through the lineage of David,
- to taking up residence in the womb of a young Hebrew girl,
- to being executed by the state on a cross,
- to rising from the dead,
- to living in our hearts....

There is this incomprehensible descent of God into the house that he built. The remarkable reversal of expectations is not that we seek after God, but that at every turn of the way God is pursuing us. The news of exceedingly great joy is that God is building a house among us and in us ~ in Christ, even in our very hearts.

I grew up in a wonderful Christian home. My parents were thoughtful-humble- gentle-generous-Christ-followers. We weren't big on after dinner devotions, but there was no mistaking that faith in Jesus was the heart beat of our family life. I can't remember a day where our house wasn't haunted or held by the love of God expressed in Christ.

But, I don't remember any conversations at home about asking Jesus into my heart. That happened at youth group retreats and televised Billy Graham crusades. That happened at Upper Peninsula Bible Camp and Cran Hill Ranch. Somewhere along the way I learned that Jesus was standing at the door to my heart and I needed to open it up and let him in. So, I asked Jesus to come into my heart.

It must have been a revolving door, because I asked Jesus to come in multiple times, the most dramatic at a Petra concert in 1976 in Orange City, Iowa. Heavy metal Christian rock and the encouragement of friends led me to ask Jesus to take up residence in my heart, one more time....

Now, I've lost track of how times I asked Jesus to come into my house, and clean up my mess, and give me rest, and help me find my true self. And, I know less today about how God would reside in my heart than I did in 1976. (Does God reside in my heart and not my neighbor's heart?) And yet, the descent of God into this broken and messy world seems more profound, or beautiful, or desperately needed to me now than it did in 1976. It seems like our only hope.

God would rend the heavens and come to help. Advent One.

By the work and will of God creation will culminate in *shalom*.  
And, in that there is comfort. Advent Two.

God's activity in creation will be realized through Jesus Christ.  
God in Christ takes up the text of great reversal. Advent Three.

The way in which God has come is through the line of David, in the person of Jesus ~ who would live not in boxes, or temples, or the houses of man, but in the hearts of people. Advent Four.

In that country song Miranda Lambert is trying find her true self in returning to the house that built her. It is probably out of orthodox bounds to suggest that God needs us. I am sure that there is some heresy lurking in the corners, but the staggering news of the gospel is that God would descend from the heights of heaven to the house that he built ~  
in order to restore right relationship,  
in order to establish peace (*shalom*),  
in order to be his true self.

Maybe the journey from heaven to the heart is God's pursuit of true self: God's true self, your true self, my true self. The deepest desire of God's heart is to be at home with us in the house that he built. The biblical story is the journey of God's pursuit of his people from garden to city ~ where he will make his dwelling with us.

Dear friends, may we wait for God's advent ~  
making space in our hearts,  
making space in our lives,  
making space for God to come in....  
for there will be rest, and peace, and our true selves.

Even so, come Lord Jesus.  
Amen.