

July 18, 2021

Proper 11 – Year B

Have you ever presumed that you know God's plans for you? Did they just happen to be identical to your own plans? I certainly have done this. Turns out I was only fooling myself.

In our reading from second Samuel, David seems to feel guilty about living in a house of cedar while the ark of the covenant, the covenant of God's presence, is kept in a tent. Surely God must want a splendid house of his own. Neither David nor Nathan seem to ask God for his input. So Nathan gives David the green light.

That night God speaks to Nathan and begs to differ. He tells Nathan to return to David and tell him that in the 40 years in the wilderness in a tent, God never asked anyone to build him a house. Who does David think he is? God does not want David to build him a temple. Instead, God will appoint a place for Israel; their own place where they will be free from enemies and evildoers.

Instead of building God a house, God will build David a house – a dynasty. God will raise up one of David's offspring and will establish his kingdom. David's son will build a house for God's home and will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

How puny David's plans appear when compared to God's. God sees the big picture. Ironically David will not build God's house, God will build David a house. How much better are God's plans than ours. It is so important to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit when we make plans for ourselves or our community. We might be surprised what God has in mind.

Our reading from Ephesians is about building and smashing barriers. We build walls against others because we are afraid. We feel that they threaten something we consider precious. During the time that Paul was writing this letter the hostility was between Gentiles and Jews. The wall between them was absolute. In the temple, for instance, there were a series of courts. First there was the court of the Gentiles, furthest from the ark. The court of the women, then the court of the Israelites, then the court of the priests and finally the Holy Place. A Gentile could

only go beyond the court of the Gentiles upon pain of death. In fact, there was an ornate stone wall between the court of the Gentiles and the rest of the temple. The result was that the Gentiles were shut out from the presence of God.

Being a Jew meant having access to the presence of God. In Exodus, God made a covenant with Israel: He would be their God and they would be his holy people, his holy nation. The covenant started with Abraham was marked by circumcision. At Mt. Sinai, God added the commandments and the law. The Gentiles had no part in this. They also had no hope of a Messiah nor could they be in the commonwealth of Israel. In order for the Gentiles to have access to God, they must be circumcised and keep the law.

Christ with his life and resurrection, changed everything. According to Paul, those who were far away from God have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Jesus broke down the wall of hostility between Gentile and Jew. There would be a new covenant. It would make Gentiles citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Jesus is creating in himself one new humanity in place of the two and reconciling both in one body through the Cross. We are being built together spiritually into a dwelling place of God.

What about us? Does any group or person threaten our beliefs? Are you afraid of them? Are you anxious that if you accept them as members of Christ that you lose an essential part of your identity? Paul suggests that instead of building walls to keep them out, we trust that God's plan and his kingdom are greater than we are.

In this section of Mark's gospel, Jesus is in great demand by the crowds. They follow him everywhere he goes. He and his disciples are so pressed by the needs of the crowd that they have nothing even to eat. So Jesus and his disciples attempt to get some rest by going to the other side of the lake. It is not to be. The people recognized Jesus and rushed around bringing sick people from all over so that they could be healed. Those who touched even the fringe of his cloak were healed.

What motivated people to drop everything and seek Jesus? He had compassion for them. He said they were like sheep without a shepherd – desperate and leaderless. He was immensely popular for his healing miracles. They were hungry to hear his word. No one spoke as he did. The people who sought him wanted only what he could give them.

Why do we seek Jesus? Do we only seek him when we are desperate or lost? Are we too busy that we have no time to listen to him? On the other hand, do we devote our time to Jesus to avoid other people? We do need to withdraw from our busyness so Jesus can refresh and energize us. Then we are able to minister in the spirit of Jesus.

In the epistle of James, he challenges his readers to show him their faith with their works. Faith without works is dead. Works without faith is just as dead.

Mother Harriet spoke about going from praying to Jesus in chapel to ministering to Jesus in his people. She was right. Let us follow her example.