

The Second Sunday after Pentecost

June 6, 2021

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

Scripture Readings

2 Chronicles 6:3-11

Then the king turned around and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel stood. And he said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who with his hand has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to David my father, saying, 'Since the day that I brought my people out of the land of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel in which to build a house, that my name might be there, and I chose no man as prince over my people Israel; but I have chosen Jerusalem that my name may be there, and I have chosen David to be over my people Israel.' Now it was in the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. But the Lord said to David my father, 'Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for my name, you did well that it was in your heart. Nevertheless, it is not you who shall build the house, but your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for my name.' Now the Lord has fulfilled his promise that he made. For I have risen in the place of David my father and sit on the throne of Israel, as the Lord promised, and I have built the house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. And there I have set the ark, in which is the covenant of the Lord that he made with the people of Israel."

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Mark 3:20-35

Then [Jesus] went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.

“Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” – for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”

And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

Hymn: *LSB 850, God of Grace and God of Glory*



1 God of grace and God of glo - ry, On Your peo - ple
 2 Lo, the hosts of e - vil round us Scorn the Christ, as -
 3 Cure Your chil - dren's war - ring mad - ness; Bend our pride to
 4 Save us from weak res - ig - na - tion To the e - vils



pour Your pow'r; Crown Your an - cient Church's sto - ry;
 sail His ways! From the fears that long have bound us
 Your con - trol; Shame our wan - ton, self - ish glad - ness,
 we de - plore; Let the gift of Your sal - va - tion



Bring its bud to glo - rious flow'r. Grant us wis - dom,
 Free our hearts to faith and praise. Grant us wis - dom,
 Rich in things and poor in soul. Grant us wis - dom,
 Be our glo - ry ev - er - more. Grant us wis - dom,



grant us cour - age For the fac - ing of this
 grant us cour - age For the liv - ing of these
 grant us cour - age Lest we miss Your king - dom's
 grant us cour - age, Serv - ing You whom we a -



hour, For the fac - ing of this hour.
 days, For the liv - ing of these days.
 goal, Lest we miss Your king - dom's goal.
 dore, Serv - ing You whom we a - dore.

Sermon

I often think of King Solomon as a rather sad, tragic figure in the Old Testament. He was so close to greatness, so close to really excelling, but he somehow managed to just fall short. He had everything going for him: son of King David and heir to all that his father had accomplished in his kingdom. He was wise, he was rich, he was powerful, and at least at the beginning he seemed to be Godly and faithful. He had it all. But he slowly slipped away from that initial faithfulness; he became caught up in his power and wealth, and his wisdom seems to have faded too as he allowed pagan idolatry to again creep into Israel.

This reading from 2 Chronicles shows us some of that, I think. Solomon is so close, and he gets it almost right... But not quite. This passage is from the dedication of that great Temple in Jerusalem - David wanted to build a Temple for God to replace the dusty old tent of a tabernacle. God told him no, but he still got everything prepared for his son: David drew up the plans, assembled the materials, even composed psalms as hymns for the worship, so all Solomon had to do was say the word and it would all come together. He did, and what we call "Solomon's Temple" was nearly dripping with gold and beautiful carvings and fine fabrics, one of the most spectacular buildings that Israel has ever seen.

But let's look at what he says here during the dedication and first worship service there. He remembers what God told David, but he doesn't see the whole picture. He sits on his father's throne, he has built the Temple his father designed, and he thinks God's promise to David has now been fulfilled. But this is only partly true -- if you remember when we heard that reading a couple of months ago, the real focus of God's words to David is not his immediate son Solomon, but the more long-term future promise of the Messiah who will come from David's line. Solomon thinks he's built a real house for God; he thinks he's the promised son of David; he thinks this is the place of God's covenant with His people.

He's not wrong, but he's not entirely right either; he simply cannot see the big picture. Because all of God's promises find their ultimate, most complete fulfillment in Jesus. We read this in 2 Corinthians chapter 1: "All the promises of God find their 'yes!' in [Christ]" and this is no exception. The Christian Church has often talked about things like Solomon and his Temple as foreshadowing Jesus, hints and tastes to help us understand the real thing when he comes.

So there's three things I was to look at here, how it's all really about Jesus. The first is, of course, that Solomon is a son of David, but he is not the promised Son of David, the Messiah, the one that so much is written about in the Old Testament prophets. God told David about a descendant who would be the son of God and would reign forever; if Solomon thought that was him, he was flattering himself, because that was always talking about Jesus.

The next thing is this idea of a "house of God." Now, is there anything special or meaningful about this building, this church sanctuary? On a physical level, no: there's nothing different about the wood or brick, the glass or drywall that make up this building than any ordinary house or office. It's hardly covered in gold and jewels like Solomon's Temple. What makes this space different is that it's been set apart for worship, for receiving the gifts of God in Christ.

But is this really a "house of God?" Solomon says, "I have built you [God] an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever." That hardly sounds wise at all. God will dwell forever in that Temple? It barely stood for four hundred years, and it's been gone from the earth for millennia now. Even Isaiah wrote, "This is what the Lord says: 'Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me?'"

The true Temple of God on earth is the person of Jesus. He refers to himself this way, talking about the Resurrection when he says "in three days I will raise up this Temple." The first chapter of John's Gospel compares the Incarnation to the old Tabernacle as God's presence in the midst of Israel, God entering our world in flesh as the person Jesus of Nazareth.

And finally, the third aspect here is the covenant. Solomon mentions "the ark, in which is the covenant of the Lord that he made with the people of Israel." Inside the ark were a pot filled with manna from the wilderness, the staff of Aaron the brother of Moses which God used to do miraculous things during the Exodus, and of course the tablets with the Ten Commandments on them. Those are what Solomon refers to as "the covenant of the Lord," and of course the ark itself is usually called "the Ark of the Covenant."

So what is a covenant? Maybe it's one of those Bible words that you don't really think about. Maybe you know the ordinary definition in English. But to really get at the heart of this, we need to consider what the word means in its Biblical context.

There are tons of covenants in the Bible; it's not an uncommon word. The very first one is Noah: God makes His covenant with Noah, to keep him and his family safe in the ark through the Flood, and then the next covenant with all humanity to never flood the whole world again. That's the covenant marked with a rainbow, and contrary to what you may hear some saying this month, that's the real significance and symbolism of the rainbow, a sign to us of God's mercy and promise. Next comes God's covenant with Abraham and his family, one repeated and renewed time after time after time. When God sends Moses to bring the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery, He tells them "I remember and keep my covenant."

A covenant is, in plain language, a formal, binding agreement; a promise between two parties. An alliance or treaty between nations is a covenant; NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, is a covenant. It can be a contract between two people, or a deeper union; a marriage is a covenant. The US Constitution is a form of covenant. A covenant is also an arrangement, an agreement: it's translated sometimes as "testament" because it's like a "last will and testament," putting your affairs in order, arranging things appropriately and promising your possessions to others. When God says He's making a covenant with us, He is signing a contract; He's ratifying a treaty and agreeing to certain terms, making promises to us.

The Ark of the Covenant held those items that symbolized God's covenant with Israel, and that ark itself was the place where the blood of the atoning sacrifices was brought. God is always faithful to His covenant, but we humans are not. Because God is faithful, He continually makes sure we can be reconciled with Him, that our union is not permanently broken.

Now here's where Jesus comes in: "covenant" and "testament" are the same word in the original language. So when Jesus says to us, as we say every week in our worship, "this is the new testament in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," he's saying "my blood shed for you, shed on the cross for your forgiveness; this blood marks and seals the new covenant between me and you, between God and His people." Every week we are reminded and re-sealed in the new covenant of God in Christ.

The prophet Jeremiah talked like this: "the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." No longer will the Law be on stone tablets in a box; it will be on our hearts, the people of God themselves becoming arks of God's covenant.

This is the new covenant that Jesus is talking about, sealed with his blood. Because a covenant required blood in the ancient world: the Hebrew idiom for making a covenant is literally "to cut a covenant." You cut it, because a binding covenant was always sealed with sacrifice. The covenant with Abraham was sealed with a sacrifice; the covenant with Israel was sealed with many thousands of sacrifices. And the new covenant is sealed with the blood of Jesus. He cut his covenant with us by being cut himself, stricken, smitten, and afflicted so that by his wounds we are healed; by his blood, God's covenant promise to us for redemption and the forgiveness of all sins is ratified and set in stone. Better than set in stone, as those stone tablets are replaced by the Spirit of God in us.

God's covenant is His promise of eternal blessings, and we receive this in the Body and Blood of Christ that we receive here every Lord's Day as we gather for this purpose. Solomon recalled God's promises and reminded Israel of God's powerful acts of salvation; we gather for the same purpose, to hear the powerful Word of God and the Gospel message, to rejoice in the new covenant

in Jesus' blood, to be in the presence of the true Temple of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the promised Son of David and Lord of all Creation.

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

P: Almighty and eternal God, Your Son Jesus triumphed over the prince of demons and freed us from bondage to sin. Help us to stand firm against every assault of Satan, and enable us always to do Your will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

All: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

P: Let us bless the Lord!

C: Thanks be to God!

P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C: Amen.