

*1 Now when the king 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 of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' 8 Now therefore thus 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, as formerly, 11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel, 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 his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14a I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.*

It's good to be back home after a wonderful learning experience in Armenia and Tbilisi. It has been years since I have had the opportunity to travel abroad and I was really excited for this trip. I took great care in packing everything I possibly need. Because this was a study tour, I needed dress clothes for more formal events, casual clothes for hiking around historical sites, clothes for the extreme heat and warmer clothes for days in the mountains. I carefully shopped for the trip and picked my clothes, carefully taking things that were mix and match, suitable for heat, respectful of culture and appropriate for the places we were visiting. I was confident as I zipped up that suitcase the morning I left for the airport and applied the lock that I had everything just right. Not only that, but I got to the airport really early, (I don't always do that), in fact I bragged to friends and family that it was the easiest, fastest check-in ever, and other than enduring the misfortune of a middle seat in a row with a family traveling with four kids, I arrived in Armenia over 24 hours later, anticipating a wonderful journey.

I watched as each person on my flight located their bags and went on their way. Soon, it was only me –there alone – beside a very empty carousel. It turns out my carefully packed bag never even left Charlotte, and while I was assured it would be put on the next plane out, it would be 7 days before it showed up. While I was touring Yerevan, my luggage went from Charlotte to Newark, to Brussels, Belgium, back to Newark, then to Paris, to Frankfurt, Germany, and finally to Yerevan, Armenia. For a week all my carefully laid plans went out the window. Suddenly I wasn't shopping for souvenirs, I was trying to find basic necessities. I had packed one extra outfit in my backpack and purchased a few things to wear. I was walking around a foreign country wearing clothes that felt a bit foreign as well, missing the conveniences that would have made my time easier. But what I discovered is that losing my luggage also caused me to change my expectations and my perspective.

I think that is the point of our scripture today. Sometimes, like King David, we come before God carrying a load of baggage...baggage that, it turns out, we don't need to lug around with us. Up until this point in Israel's history they had struggled. They have roamed the wilderness for 40 years, they have claimed a promised land and then fought enemies to try and keep it. Between the many battles and David's

enthusiastic dancing in the joy of bringing the Ark back to Jerusalem, David finally has a moment to rest...to catch his breath...but as he sits in the stillness of his castle, he has time to think. I can imagine him standing at a window, looking out upon the tent that housed the Ark of the Covenant and perhaps thinking, "Why should God live in a tent. I have a nice home. I could build one for God as well." Perhaps David's desire is honorable. Maybe he really does want to do something great for God...or maybe he wants to avoid any future humiliation of having the Ark stolen again...or maybe he has decided it is his job to protect the presence of God, not the other way around...or maybe he sees this as a chance to do something great for a legacy to his own reign as king. Either way, David makes the decision to build a temple. It seems like a good idea, even Nathan agrees. But it turns out that God has something to say about it. Nathan goes back to David and says, "Yeah, about your temple. Turns out God likes the tent just fine. You may think you need a temple, but God wants something else.

How often do we do this? We think we know what is best. We have everything planned out and packaged neatly and THEN we go to God and say, "Here's what I have and here is what I'm going to do for you." Maybe we are also very good about shoving God into a box and expecting God to stay there so that we can go visit when we want...or when we need something.

God's argument for refusing the temple is simple. God has always LED the people. God's presence has always been AMONG the people, at the forefront of who they are and where they are going. Now David wants to build a house, stick God in it, and go about his way. Without the Ark in their midst, God may not be in their vision. As a struggling people, they need eyes on God...they need the assurance and hope of God's presence among them.

What if we were to do the same? What if we were to think more about tents than we do about temples? In a recent Zoom meeting I was part of Bishop Carter in speaking about the future of the United Methodist Church challenged us with this notion as well. He said we need to start thinking more about tents than temples. What if we were to think more about God dwelling out there, in the world, than in here? What if we were to see God's presence in our own wanderings and struggles...God's presence in the community and in her people? What if we were able to keep our eyes focused on God and let God lead and dictate our moves, instead of telling God what we think God should do?

If you think about it, this is what we try to do with our call to worship each Sunday. Our call to worship is the moment that we are invited to lay down all the baggage we have carried in with us that we thought we needed...and turn our eyes upon Jesus. The call to worship is an invitation to remember that God has been in a tent, everywhere we have been this past week, and now God invites us to come for a moment of joy and hope, comfort and rest.

When I lost my bag on the flight to Armenia, I realized I didn't really need most of what I had packed. When it finally arrived it seemed so excessive. I brought home so many clothes I never even wore. I realized that my focus had shifted from what I had thought I needed and what I didn't have, to what I did as I worked hard to not let it overshadow the wonderful experience I was there to have. Rather than dwell on how badly the airlines had messed up, I learned to focus on the people who tried to help me: the hotel desk clerk who called the airport knowing I didn't speak Armenian, a cab driver who called his friend who worked in the airport and got me in a back door, the translator, fellow travelers who offered to share things, and others. Eventually I learned to let the baggage go and to focus on the goodness around me and that single shift in perspective made the journey so much more fulfilling.

This is what the call to worship does for us - it reorients us to God's presence and God's goodness. It invites us to let go of the baggage we thought we needed to bring and instead enter the holy space of listening to God and learning to follow God...only then can we find out what we truly need for the journey ahead.