

Last week our first lesson told of David bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, his new city he was creating as capitol of the kingdoms he had united. Today, we heard about David's plan to build a Temple in Jerusalem in which to house the Ark.

“Surely,” David reasoned, “the Lord would want a permanent place after being moved around in a tent all those years in the wilderness. And besides,” David added, “my own house is very grand. Surely God would want an even better house than my palace.”

Let's freeze the story right there for a moment. David was king because God had chosen David to be king. David hadn't been BORN as a king-to-be; he had been a shepherd, eighth son of a farmer and sheep-breeder. And David hadn't EARNED being king. Oh, sure, he had courage enough to confront a mighty warrior and faith enough to win. And David WAS a mighty leader, a leader of people and war and worship.

But weren't those talents, those abilities, all gifts from God, to be used as God desired? David was acting as if HE had to make everything work, as if he were responsible for everything. Of course, there WAS the new capitol to create, the tribes to unite, a new national identity to forge, new roles and responsibilities to give away.

David might feel right at home in our time, at least when it came to a work ethic. Because David WAS doing everything he could think of to make HIS kingdom God's kingdom.

Don't we American Christians do this today? We work to bring God's kingdom more and more into existence. We spread the kingdom, share the work of the kingdom, and live by kingdom values. We even pray, “Thy kingdom COME, [O Lord], thy will be DONE...” with the emphasis on the verbs. We are doers, God's hands and feet and voices in our community and our world. And I am so very happy that this is who we are, and that God's work is the work we do.

There's just one (ahem) teeny tiny problem. The prayer Jesus taught us is this: “THY kingdom com, THY will be done...” The emphasis is on God, who is the prime mover of all things.

Back to King David: He forgot who the prime mover is; he thought that was HIS function as king, on behalf of God, you understand. This is when Nathan, whose name means “given,” this is when Nathan made his first appearance in scripture.



Nathan's two sons had been friends of David from their youth in Saul's court. And Nathan clearly was in a position to guide King David when David shared his plans for building God a permanent home. Initially, Nathan had agreed that David's plans were well reasoned and logically sound, "God would surely approve," he said.

But God "called on" Nathan and vented. God asked, "Did ANYONE ask ME if I wanted a house?" Then God told Nathan the reason his plans differed from David's.

This is very unusual behavior on God's part. God usually doesn't explain himself. But this time God did. The bottom line is that God doesn't want to allow us to confine him in any one place (in our minds). And God doesn't want to allow us to think he's only here for US and for people like us. And God just doesn't work on our time table, durned it!

This is when God transformed Nathan into a prophet. See, kings want to be prophets, but they can't. Kings are too captured by their role in developing and preserving the kingdom. Kings always need people around them who speak God's truth, no matter the consequences. Wise kings cultivate truth-tellers.

Truth-tellers serve a vital role in any community by pointing us to God. They must speak up by delivering God's message. Nathan teaches us what is required, though, to be a truth-teller. God and what God wants is the only truth there is. David and Nathan alike were required to consult with and listen to God, and neither of them did at first.

Without consulting God, truth-tellers are merely people with opinions. And kings, when they do not consult with God, are merely people with a bit more perceived power than others, but still just people with opinions. The key question is, "What does God want?"

In our lesson today, God told Nathan what he wanted, and when. And Nathan advised David properly by sharing God's words to David. Nathan remained a key advisor to both David and David's son Solomon, who built God a Temple in Jerusalem. That first Temple, by the way, was at least 16,200 square feet, roughly the size of this church facility here, except the temple was about 20 stories tall by our standards.

I won't locate any place for us to identify with in this lesson. I see no David and no Nathan here among us. We are all consulting with God as we continue to discern God's desire for our future. And the discernment of each of us is required to remove our personal biases when a community seeks God's will.

Here's OUR place within this story: The Hebrew word for "house" also means "household." God told Nathan that David needn't build God a house, that God would build David a household. God promised to bind David's people together FOREVER into a people who worship him (in whatever house God chooses to be in).

God says to us today, "Don't worry about who will follow you in the household I have made you to be. That's my job. Just do what I'm asking you to do." I would add that we will know what God wants us to do when we listen for him to tell us, and when we listen to each other.

We've been discerning for the past several years about building God two houses: affordable apartments and a new church. We still don't know the outcome, but we continue to lean forward in faith. In this context, today's question for us is this: What is God telling us about what we're planning? Has God activated any prophets among you? Who among us will share God's word for our future?

I won't; I am embroiled in plans, albeit plans drawn in community and through prayer, hoping and trusting with faith and love that we are doing what God has asked us to do. I specifically want to hear what you have to say. So, I've moved aside Forum on August 12 to hear what God's telling you. Opinions are always welcome, so bring those. But what we really need is God's truth; who will be our Nathan?