



Solomon's Temple



A Sermon By
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July 28, 2019
The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

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<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2019-07-28-AAC.mp3>.

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1 Kings 6:1, 11-14, 22, 29-30, 37-38

Psalm 84

John 2:13-21

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It is difficult to overstate the significance of the Temple in Jewish consciousness. The Temple has religious significance, as well as cultural, political, economic and historical importance. Our psalm today proclaims, "How dear to me is your dwelling, O Lord of hosts.... One day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere" (Ps. 84:1, 9). This declaration conveys a deep-seated love and reverence for the Temple. It is one of many such sentiments found in the scriptures. The Temple, God's dwelling place, was the center of Jewish life. It was at the core. Today, in our summer preaching series, "Misunderstood Stories of the Bible," we will explore the Temple, and in the process, see what we learn about God.

Our reading from 1 Kings recounts the story of Solomon building the Temple. It was common in the ancient Near East for kings to erect a temple early in their reign. Politically speaking, building a temple following the events that led to the king's investiture drew attention to those successful, often military exploits and helped to establish royal authority. Religiously speaking, temples were dedicated to the glory of the king's patron deity, thereby securing continued divine patronage, in theory, and enhancing royal prestige.

Early in his reign, King David chose the ancient city and national fortification of Jerusalem as his capital city. Jerusalem thus became the political center of David's realm. To make it the religious center, David moved the Ark of the Covenant, that chest containing the tablets of the Ten Commandments, to the capital city. David wanted to build a temple there to permanently house the Ark of the Covenant, but his desire didn't come to fruition. He secured a site and amassed huge amounts of materials for the Temple's future construction and furnishing. The actual construction of the Temple, however, was done by King Solomon, David's son and heir.

King Solomon is remembered commonly for his wisdom. Tradition has ascribed to Solomon the three biblical books of Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. In addition to being wise, Solomon was a man of determination and drive. He shared his father's dream and undertook the ambitious project of building a temple dedicated to YHWH, the God of the Israelites.

Our text outlines the great opulence with which Solomon designed the Temple. First, he built the structure, then he carved exotic engravings throughout the edifice; including, cherubim, palm trees and flowers. Next, King Solomon overlaid the entire thing in gold – the inner and outer rooms, the altar, even the floors. The structure, as you can imagine, was magnificent! Once the building was done, Solomon installed the Ark of the Covenant. With this installation, the Temple was complete.

To us, the Temple's construction and completion may not seem like an incredible feat. What's the big deal, right? But it was monumentally important for the people of Israel. See, it wasn't just a building. It signified so much more. The same God who brought Israel out of Egypt now dwelt with them in their land. The Israelites were no longer wandering nomads in the Sinai Peninsula. They were established in their own land, the land that God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were a nation in their own right, with a glorious and wise king. The Temple represented established permanence and presence – both God's permanent presence and the permanent presence of the Israelites as a people and as a nation. This cannot be understated.

However, wonderful and representative as it was, the Temple's permanency failed. Solomon's Temple, in all its glory, was eventually destroyed by the Babylonians. The Israelites were exiled. As they once were, after

fleeing Egypt, the Israelites were again, without a settled, established homeland. They do eventually return to Jerusalem, and rebuild the Temple, again establishing a religious, political, and cultural center.

This Second Temple is the Temple that stood during Jesus' time. It's the Temple featured throughout the stories of the New Testament. Jesus was presented by his parents here, officially inducting him into Judaism. It was to this Temple that Jesus and his followers made pilgrimages to and worshiped in during their adult lives. It was this Temple, in which today's Gospel story took place. And it was this Temple that was destroyed by the Romans mere decades after Jesus' death and resurrection. All that remains of the Temple today is the Western Wall, the remaining wall of the Temple Mount that is closest to the site of the Temple. It is Judaism's holiest site.

The importance of the Temple in Jewish consciousness cannot be overstated. According to scripture, Jerusalem is "the city that God chose" (1 Kings 8:44). The Temple is the place of which God says, "My name shall be there" (1 Kings 8:29). The Temple was understood as the place where heaven meets earth and where God's glory appears (Isaiah 6:1-3). It was the holy of holies, a place to commune with God.

However, though the Temple is central to Israel's worship for many centuries, it is not an essential element for relationship with God. When it was destroyed, not once but twice, God was still present with and attentive to God's people. The Temple's presence helped institutionalize religion for the Israelites. It provided a literal structure to house God's Law and a place in which the letter of the Law could be enacted by God's people. But the Temple could not contain God, for God is not to be boxed in.

The God who created the cosmos, bringing order from chaos; who breathed life into creation, who walked in the garden with human beings, knitting them garments to clothe themselves with; who destroyed the corrupt world but saved a remnant; who parted the Red Sea and led the people with a cloud by day and a pillar of flame in the night; who championed a boy over a giant; who in today's reading said, "I will not forsake my people;" THIS GOD's presence cannot and will not be contained. This God, chooses to be present with God's people no matter what, and no matter where.

God is present with us throughout the ups and down of life. When we are established and settled, as the Israelites were under King Solomon, God is there. When we are wandering and lost, as the Israelites were during the Babylonian exile, God is there. When we can afford to build opulent structures to God's glory, and when we cannot. When we are on top of the world, and when we are defeated and cast out. No matter what, God is present.

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of his body as the Temple of God. And surely God was present in the person of Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us. In Jesus, God revealed the extent of God's love for us. God dwelt among us, as one of us that we might fully know how very present God is in our lives. Nothing can contain God, and yet all things contain God – body, Temple, institution, wilderness. We need only pay attention to witness God's presence in our lives, God's desire for relationship with us, God's faithfulness from the beginning of time to this very moment. Amen.