

Ephesians 2:11-22

Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled to God in Christ and brought into one community; the lines of division have been removed by God through Christ's cross. So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Jesus and the disciples withdraw to a quiet place; the crowds follow them. Jesus has compassion on them for they are like sheep without a shepherd. The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. They went in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them and hurried on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

48B Readings

Two words stand out in this week's readings: "Shepherd" and "House". In the Old Testament continuous reading, there is a play on the word "house" (The Hebrew *bayit* means both "house" and "dynasty"). David seeks to build a temple (house) for God, but God refuses, declaring instead that God will build a dynasty (house) for David. It is God who builds the house and shepherds God's people. Psalm 89 celebrates the human shepherd, David, who has been established to rule over and care for God's people. In Mark's Gospel Jesus fulfils both aspects - as the human descendant of David, and the divine incarnation of God. Jesus has compassion on God's people who are like scattered sheep, and he heals, cares for, and provides for them as a truly good Shepherd. Finally, Paul takes the picture one step further as the people of God, both Jew and Gentile, find a place together in God's household of grace, but also become, together, a house (temple) for God's Spirit. In David we receive the promise of God's divine house, ruled over by God's good shepherd, in which God's people will be cared for and protected. In Jesus, this promise is fulfilled, as the promised Good Shepherd creates God's divine house from both Jew and Gentile who receive his grace and submit to his reign. Those who find their home in God's household are called to be a house for God's Spirit and a welcoming community in which all people can find a home, a place to belong and a connection with God through the Spirit. It's a message of divine grace, sovereignty and care, and of human reconciliation, inclusivity and service – two things which always go together in the Reign of God!

It is easy to fall into the trap of trying to domesticate God, to co-opt God to our own agendas and causes. God will always refuse to be domesticated. We cannot build a house for God, and thereby claim God as our own. Rather, it is God who builds the house for us and for all people. God's Reign seeks to remove all that divides us and to bring all people together in an inclusive community in which God's Spirit can move and work. On a global scale this radical inclusivity has challenging implications. We do not get to recruit God to our national, economic, or corporate agendas. Rather, we are called to bring ourselves and our dreams under submission to God's mission, allowing ourselves to become human agents of God's compassion, justice, and peace. We are called to be shepherds under instruction of the great Good Shepherd. In the global economy, we are called to work for collaborative ways of doing business so that all can share in the wealth of the world, to continue moving the world into a more just, inclusive, and peaceful reality.

(Source: John van de Laar, Sacredise)

2 Samuel 7:1-14a

David decides that he wants to build a temple (house) for God, but God, through the prophet Nathan, refuses him, and tells him that he is not the one to build a temple, and that God has never needed a temple. But, God promises David that his dynasty (house) will be established forever and that God will raise up a descendant of David to sit on his throne.

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 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." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you."

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? 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. 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?"

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; 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. 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, 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. 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. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.

Psalms 89:20-37

God called and anointed David to be God's chosen king. God promised him a dynasty to last forever. If David's descendants abandon God's ways, God will discipline them, but never withdraw God's love, ensuring that David's dynasty is established forever.

I found my servant David; **I anointed him with my holy oil,**
whom my hand will (firmly) support,
as my arm will also strengthen him.

No enemy will outsmart him, **nor wicked humiliate him,**
I will crush his adversaries before him,
and strike down those who hate him.

My faithfulness and steadfast love will be with him,
and through my name his horn shall be raised.

I will put the sea on his (left) hand
and the rivers on his right hand;
he will declare to me, "You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation."

Indeed, I shall set him as firstborn,
the Most High of the kings of the earth.

I will extend to him my steadfast love forever,
and my covenant will remain with him.

I have ordained that his offspring shall last forever;
his throne like the days of the heavens.

If his descendants leave my teaching behind
and not follow in the way of my commandments;
if they profane my statutes

and not keep my commandments,

I will call rebellion to account with a rod,
and crooked activities with plagues;

but I will not put an end to my steadfast love for him,
and I will not betray my faithfulness (to him)

I will not profane my covenant,
and what comes from my lips I will not change.

I have sworn once (and for all) by my holiness:
I will not lie to David;

his descendants shall be for ever,
and his throne like the sun before me;
like the moon it will stand forever.

And as a witness in the clouds will be faithful.