

*Texts: 1 Kings 5:1-5, 8:1-13; John 2:19-21*

*Subject: Solomon Builds the Temple*

*Theme: Where the Word Lives*

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost, Reformation Sunday, October 31, 2021;

*Living Hope Lutheran, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Where is God? Here in this building? Up high on a cloud? Mount Charleston? Laguna beach? Down in the washes underneath the Las Vegas strip? Yes. You don't have to go looking. God is always near. But as human beings tied to physical bodies and 5 senses, we like to have a touchpoint, an awareness a site set apart for holy things. We need a container - even though we know God cannot be contained. The world is our temple, indeed, but here in this place, where the organ plays, and the children laugh, and the people sing, we feel near to the Lord. This is where the Word lives.

We bought our house a little over 7 years ago from Melinda - a member of this congregation. She was moving away and while we were sad to see her go, we were grateful for a place to live in the neighborhood. It was built in 1961, and had seen a fire at some point, gone through renovations, and multiple paint schemes. It was once owned by the garden editor of the local newspaper, and featured some beautifully kept landscaping features. In the last couple of years, we've tried to improve things a bit, replacing a deck, painting some walls, removing a dead tree. We craft our surroundings to fit our needs. With 4 kids that need space to play, we work to make it our own. Our house is filled with memories - where Jacob was born, where family gathers for holidays, where we play and eat, and rest. But ultimately, it's wood and stucco, some

brick, walls and a roof. It won't last forever. But it means a lot to us - not because of how it looks, but because of what's inside.

Over the last two weeks we heard from Lourdes Olson about how God saw past the outward appearance and looked at the heart of David. Pastor Matt shared about the promises of God to always save us. This week, we hear of the son of King David fulfilling the Word of God to build a great Temple.

David wanted to build a house for the Lord. But because of David's past mistakes, God told him he would not be the builder. That would be reserved for his son. So when the time came, David anointed Solomon to be King, and in time, He consolidated his power, formed alliances and signed trade deals with neighboring nations, and built the temple. The Temple was beautiful, not adorned with images of gods of other cultures, but with carvings from nature, palm trees and flowers, a reminder of the beauty of God's creation. The Temple was built on Mount Moriah - the place where we heard of Abraham and Isaac - where God provided what needed for the sacrifice. When the temple was dedicated a thick cloud filled the space, a reminder of God's presence in the wilderness, when God led them by a pillar of smoke by day, and of fire by night. The temple was a place for God to stay, so that the people would know how to commune with the Lord, and be able to offer their gifts and sacrifices - a place for the Lord to live.

A little over 500 years ago, a building project began in Rome - where the church began the construction of Saint Peter's Basilica. As part of the fundraising effort, priests went out to the people and preached on and solicited financial contributions. They sold *indulgences* - special certificates of blessing or privilege that granted the bearer a

shortened term in purgatory. If you haven't spent time in the Catholic church, it might be very confusing, but it's enough to know that Martin Luther was the most well-known one preaching against this practice. The Reformation began when Luther wrote a memo called the 95 Theses, articles to be debated within the church, focused on the errors of the Pope, and the centrality of the Word of God's grace and forgiveness.

What is it about a temple? I've visited Cathedrals and Basilicas, churches big and small. Some of you have been to Rome, and to magnificent houses of worship across Europe, and here at home. In England, and in New York City, maybe even in Las Vegas, so many of these buildings stand empty. They are used for musical performances, maybe a wedding or a funeral here and there. They are beautiful places, but they are made for hearing the word, and for the glory of God. Maybe we treat Martin Luther like a temple. Many of his writings we hold up as central to our practice of the faith, as they give way to God's grace, and freedom to love and serve one another. But others included virulent anti-semitism, which we do not accept. We do not worship the man, but share in his joy of the word of the Lord.

God went with the Jewish people in the desert - traveled with them in the wilderness in tents and tabernacles. The people moved around, so God went with them. When they were settled, some things changed. They were in the land God has promised them. David brought the ark of the covenant home. In that special container were the tablets, on which were written the laws God gave to Moses, the Word of the law. Solomon wanted to build a temple that would show just how powerful and glorious God was - for the sake of the surrounding nations, and for the people of Israel, it would be *the* central institution for them, the place for worship and sacrifice, for gatherings and

more. The temple would be the place to keep the ark and its contents. The people paid for it through taxes and trade with neighboring nations. They were conscripted into laboring to build it. Even when systems are flawed, we can expect God to reform and redeem them and us. The lives of the people - and the whole nation were centered around it, and the temple held deep meaning for them.

We have this church. Folks moving out West from places like New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Minnesota, in 1948 decided they needed a place to worship and pray, and to share life together. They gathered what they could, and raised the funds and built this building in 1956. It's not quite the same as Solomon's Temple, but we gather here for many of the same reasons. We come to church to see the ones we love, to sing hymns of praise, to share our tears and laments too. We come to hear a word of grace and good news, maybe to be filled for another week in the kingdom, to be inspired for service, to connect to the community, and to pray and proclaim that Jesus is Lord. We know that God is with us where ever we go, but here, in worship, when we hear the Word, when we speak the Word, we know God is near. And God has promised to be with us especially in the meal we share in this place. In, with, and under, the bread, and the wine, or juice as the case may be, Christ is fully present, for you. This was a revelation, a rediscovery of the nearness of God's Word for Martin Luther and the reformers who came after him.

Previously the church in Rome held that only the bread could be given at communion, the wine reserved for the priests alone. People might spill it. The church treated the word the same way - it might be dangerous in the hands of the common people. The word was read of course, but in Latin, and most could not read it for

themselves or even understand. People might misunderstand it. Luther's work in reading and studying scripture was a rediscovery of the essence of the gospel, justification by grace through faith. Luther knew the word was a gift - the word that became flesh and blood in Jesus was not for the priestly ones alone, but for all the people! The word was out of the container! To the authorities of the church, Luther was a rebel to be silenced, but to people, he became a hero, and with the invention of the printing press his writings spread quickly. Luther was excommunicated 500 years ago - in 1521. He went into hiding and translated scripture so that people could hear it in their own language, read it and teach it. The word lived among the people again.

Some of you here might be lifelong Lutherans - but many of us come from different church backgrounds, have spent time in other Christian families, named Baptist, or Pentecostal, or Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Methodists. These were all formed after the beginning of the Reformation in 1517. We all know of Jesus and his love. We know we are saved by grace through faith, by Christ alone. Some might differ in how they describe just *how* this all happens, but we can agree with the apostle Paul that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3;17). Where the Word lives, it is spoken and shared, the Holy Spirit builds faith in us, brings us to hear and believe that this good news is for us. The Word lives and works in us and on us. We are freed and forgiven, loved into new life. The Word lives - not just in the temple, in buildings made of bricks and stone and stucco, but in us.

We are where the Word lives, since the Word came to live with us and dwell with us, and to die and rise for us. We don't have an ark, but in the middle of this place we have a cross. This is a powerful reminder of Jesus Christ our Lord, who has called each

of us through the Word. We, like this building, are a container for the glory of God, and our role is to open a window, to fling wide the doors of the temples of our hearts, and minds, and mouths - to let the good stuff out, to share the goodness and grace of God when we leave here. We tell the story, we proclaim God's power, and majesty, and love to ones who are hurting, who have been shackled to systems of injustice, injured by human prejudice, or locked out of loving relationships for too long. We hear the Word and are freed from the things that held us down in the past. We are saved and sent, washed and welcomed, and called to carry out the work that we have in our own communities. God has a home in us. The Word abides in us. God has built these buildings of flesh and blood, and they are holy dwelling places, always loved, always changing, always being made new.

Amen.