

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

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The readings from the Bible you heard today on this 4th Sunday of Advent have several very strong themes running throughout: such as Children, and Descendants, and God's promises, and Humility, and God Speaking, and our Listening. And then there is today theme of the RESULT of listening and obeying to God's voice, and that is God Has a Home, and the attending theme, God Desires a Place to Dwell.

Lord, let your word only be spoken, and your word only be heard.
Amen.

Did you hear what I heard? In the first reading, taken from the 2nd Book of the Prophet Samuel, we heard one half of a conversation between King David and God Almighty. What you didn't hear read this morning (and so I encourage you when you get home to read all of Chapter 7) wherein David laments that he has a brand new large house and God's glory still resides in a tent. God needs, in all of David's appreciation and sincerity, a bigger and more permanent house. A temple, a home.

The Psalm, probably written by King Solomon after completing that new big home for God years later, proclaims more about the Home of God, using the words "habitation" and "resting-place". By God's choice, Zion, or the holy mountain around which Jerusalem is built, is that place.

From the Gospel of Luke we heard that God would by miracle alone cause the young woman Mary to become pregnant with the incarnation of the Son of God, to be named Jesus. The angel's message specifically points to Mary's womb. And isn't the womb, the place where the

December 24, 2017

conceived baby would know as his Home? Mary then becomes the Dwelling place of God for nine months.

And did you see what I saw? We're not quite celebrating the actual birth of this Jesus yet – well, in about 10 hours we will be at our Midnight Mass, and tomorrow, but what I saw was the setting of the new world home of Jesus Christ, beginning with a manger. And all of us together created the scene of Jesus' dwelling place.

It's not hard for anyone of us to consider what HOME is all about, and where it is, literally and metaphorically, or emotionally. Or even eternally. Yes. Many of us did not come from that kind of home where we might have wanted to return, or take delight in, or hold fondly. This kind of emotional trauma or disdain can have terrible effects in us. And only by God's grace, good help, and loving fellowship can we move from defining home and dwelling place without pain. But mornings like this, and scenes like this, with God's help, can help us rewire our neuronal pathways to see a new thing. A new draw. A new rejoicing.

It is so engrained in us that sometimes it takes some maturity and perhaps a right moment to not get confused about where we are, what home is really all about, and how to avoid thinking that the wrong action is some kind of home.

On the bright side of that is a delightful TV commercial, where a group of kids are playing baseball in an empty lot. The youngest of them all, maybe 5 or 6, manages to get on base. The next batter hits it out into the street. Somebody yells at the little kid, "Go home! Run home!" He looks a little shocked when he hears that, and then he yells, "OKAY!" and turns around and runs right out of the baseball field and heads, you know, home. His home.

December 24, 2017

Personally, I would love all children to err on the side of going to their safe home, than running to home on the diamond and getting their safe.

Running back to our scriptures and themes, what we find to be true is this: more than us trying to make an acceptable “dwelling place” or home for God, the higher priority is to allow God to make his dwelling in us. And this comes by our willingness to be humble and obedient.

David had to hear God saying to him, “no, I did not ask you to build me a home or dwelling place. I will leave the physical house to one of your descendants”at the same time Christians have always heard those words to mean Jesus, born into the house and lineage of David, who would become that very dwelling of God in His fullness for us.

David wasn't really in trouble about that. God knew his sincerity. And David relented, and gave praise and thanksgiving to God for making his home with David.

Mary, of course, was faced with a completely unexpected situation when the Angel Gabriel visited her and spoke those famous words. Later those words became the basis of the Rosary prayer, which we will say later after communion. “Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with thee.”

And in fact, as Mary gave her permission, humbly and obediently, she then conceived -- as foretold by the prophet Isaiah – and became herself the dwelling place of God.

In each of these situations we find a form of prayer that the Prayer Book lists as one of the seven primary forms of prayer. It is called the prayer of OBLATION. You can see that section in the Book of Common Prayer on page 857. And you will hear that word twice in our Prayer of Consecration today, after the Holy, Holy, Holy praise. It happens again

December 24, 2017

in that same prayer of consecration after the words of institution which are “This is my body” and “This is my blood.” You won’t hear the word oblation but you will hear the actual prayer, the words used to make that prayer of oblation. It’s all built in, and in a major, major way, to our Holy Communion prayers.

This is because we must desire to be that dwelling place of God. And because God desires each of us to be his dwelling place, his home, he will answer that prayer. In the final assessment, the talk of spiritual home and dwelling place will be about oblation, which has two sides to it. The first, as I’ve pointed to is the willingness to be inhabited by God. And the second, is the result of oblation, of giving yourself to God.

To invite God into your life, or your heart, is the basis of the oblation prayer. And God answers faithfully to come and dwell. God seeks his home in us.

The setting of the manger scene, as precious and yet oblivious as some of our very young may approach it, is the illustration. Somewhere in any age, we see the gathering, and we understand the setting of a dwelling place.

Since the prayer of oblation is never finished, that is, every day we may offer our lives to God and ask him to fill our days with his direction and guidance and wisdom and Holy Spirit power, the manger scene can also be for us a reminder of not just now, but the oblation prayer for our whole life during our entire life.

David wanted to; Mary became it; we may continue in both.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen.

December 24, 2017