**July 18, 2021 The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church**

**Second Samuel 7:1-14a**

**“The Invention of Grace”**

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A little New York City color, as you walk along Madison Avenue you always need to be prepared to work your way through a maze of window shoppers. If you do not pay close attention you can bump straight into someone as they have paused to glance into a shop window at the latest fashion creation or some such other purchasing opportunity.

On the Upper Eastside, always, always, always, the biggest crowds are gathered around the real estate windows. The folks fogging up the window often have the same curious intensity as a group of twelve year old boys trying to get a peek at a cover of a Playboy magazine.

It can be seductive, looking at all of the enticing living possibilities. My wife Marta and I had the same experience as we looked at Saint Louis real estate online before moving here. Whether you are seeking to currently move or not, it can be fun to browse through all of the housing opportunities online and daydream about what life would be like in a different context, either across the street or across the country.

 Well today’s scripture text from the book of Second Samuel is right up our alley. It is all about who lives where and who decides where everyone gets to live.

Under God’s instruction and guidance, King David has defeated the Philistines and he is sitting pretty in his brand spankin’ new, deluxe house of cedar. As he is lying back in his Barcalounger, he looks out his window to see the tent in which the Ark of the Covenant, believed to be God’s dwelling place on earth, is sheltered. Now David knows that everything he has accomplished has been a gift from God. He sizes up the disparity in the living arrangements between himself and God and then he summons the prophet Nathan to inform him of a plan to build God a super deluxe home as well.

 At this point I am a little curious as to what exactly David’s motivation may be. Is he feeling guilty that he has better digs than the ruler of the universe? Is he so filled with gratitude that he wants to demonstrate his devotion by doing something nice for God? Is he surmising he can control God in some way by putting the divine in a sturdy box of a house? Is he thinking that building an impressive temple for God further consolidates the symbolism of his own power? Is he hoping to curry even more of God’s favor by providing the divine with a new home?

 It could be any one of these possibilities or some combination of all of them. We just do not know.

What we do know is that although the prophet Nathan thinks it is a good idea, God is not exactly excited about the impending construction. The divine makes it clear that although David may be king and live in a fine house of cedar, David will not be calling the shots in their relationship. God will set the agenda, not David. God reminds the prophet Nathan that all of history is under divine care. The history of the nation of Israel is recounted, from the Exodus in Egypt to the rise of David and beyond into the future of what will follow this king, a dynasty of his very own.

 It is not David who will shape God’s world rather God who will shape David’s world. But in the midst of what appears to be a divine scolding for David, something in the entire universe shifts, the shockwaves and implications of which we are still attempting to comprehend all these years later. These promises offered to David about his future are a radical departure from what has ever come before in God’s relationship with humanity.

 Under the Mosaic covenant with God we knew where we stood. God was always faithful to us and offered us the ways in which we could be faithful to God. If we followed in these faithful ways, then God would continue to bless us. If we fell away from the faithful ways, then God’s blessings would be removed. Adherence to God’s law promised God’s presence and favor. Straying from such adherence promised absence and its consequences.

David’s predecessor, King Saul, lost everything when he neglected to follow through on the details he was instructed by God to follow. As sure as one could count on gravity to drop you to the floor with a misstep in your walking, a misstep in your leadership would lead to having the royal rug pulled from underneath you. But in this text, gravity has been rescinded for David.

David’s misguided offer of a house to dedicate to the Lord is dwarfed by God’s gift of a house, as in a dynasty, for David.

We find ourselves standing at the invention of grace,

the “aha” moment when God chooses a different course by which to relate to humanity. The simple cause and effect relationship is left behind for something harder for us to define and grasp. A relationship based on “if/then,” as in “if you follow my commandments then, I will bless you,” has been transformed into “nevertheless,” as in “whether you follow my commandments or not, nevertheless I will bless you.”

 Now this is obviously not the full blown grace we will receive in Jesus Christ but this shift in relationship cannot be underestimated in its importance. If we have yet to grasp how powerful this shift is, in verse fourteen God announces, “I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.” This is the first biblical reference to God being called “father,” denoting a relationship of intimacy not to be imagined by those who came before. The text goes on to say that God will indeed punish David’s progeny if necessary “But I will not take my steadfast love from him as I took it from Saul.”

 Heaven knows David this king, both powerfully faithful and potently flawed, would need all the grace he could get. If God had kept the relationship between them based on some if/then model it all would have failed so miserably. It was only the “nevertheless” that kept David’s relationship with God afloat, that let David be a faithful monarch even in the midst of unforgivable failures.

 And I say thank God for David and his relationship with the divine. I do not suppose I will ever be king of anything but just trying to get through my own little life

I have moments of faithfulness but also more than my share of failures. The only way I can hope to stay afloat in the midst of it all is with this gift of grace begun with David and perfected in Christ Jesus.

 Anne Lamott describes grace in this way, “It is unearned love—the love that goes before, that greets us on the way. It’s the help you receive when you have no bright ideas left, when you are empty and desperate and have discovered that your best thinking and most charming charm have failed you. Grace is the light or electricity or juice or breeze that takes you from that isolated place
and puts you with others who are as startled and embarrassed and eventually grateful as you are to be there.” (Lamott p139)

 In the end all of us need a little unearned love; a boost to carry us through this complicated existence of ours with so many shades of gray. If we only received the love we deserved we would not do so well at all. For those of you who are parents you have experienced this first hand with your own children. Sure, some days they are remarkable and wonderful little people who you cannot help but cherish for all of the joy they bring into your life.

But then there are days when they are not quite so charming and lovable. If you based your relationship with your children on an if/then clause for your love and support what broken children they would be. You have no choice but to love them nevertheless, good days and bad.

 This is what God realized had to be done with David.

Grace had to be invented by God or there was no hope for us at all. If our lives were to be lived under the constant cloud of an if/then clause what joy could be found for us?

 Jonathan Edwards, the eighteenth century preacher who is probably most famous for the scary sermon title “Sinners in the hands of an Angry God,” discussed grace in this way,

“Grace is but glory begun, glory is but grace perfected.”

If David was going to serve his people and his God well, if he was going to have any chance at glory he had to know that God’s love for him was not conditional. None of us would have any chance of becoming who God calls us to be if we were forced to live knowing that the next mistake we make might be the one that banishes us from God’s love. Instead, the unbreakable promise of God’s love has set us on a path toward glory.

 The divine has indeed built a house for us, a shelter from the many storms that we will face in this life, its foundation has been made firm in Jesus Christ and its name is grace.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Lamott, Anne, Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith,

 Random House, New York, 1999.