

WHERE WE BELONG: A House With a Twist

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

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I.

"Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade" is a 1989 action-adventure film directed by Steven Spielberg. The story follows archaeologist Indiana Jones (played by Harrison Ford) as he embarks on a quest to find the Holy Grail, the cup said to have been used by Jesus Christ during the Last Supper.

Teaming up with his father, Indiana Jones travels across different countries, solving puzzles and overcoming obstacles. The quest ultimately leads them to the Temple of the Sun in the Canyon of the Crescent Moon, where they confront the Nazis and the ancient challenges guarding the Holy Grail.

This is your spoiler alert, but the movie has been out since 1989, so you've had time, friends. In a scene near the end of the movie, they must choose the holy grail from a vast selection of goblets or cups on display in a cave. The bad guy goes first as the knight guarding the Grail says, "You must choose. But choose wisely, for as the true Grail will bring you life, the false Grail will take it from you." Knowing Jesus was a king, the bad guy looks through the cups and chooses the most ornate cup, fit for royalty. He lifts it up and says, "This is indeed the cup of the King of Kings." He dips it in the water, takes a drink, and then a few moments later, begins to age rapidly and horrifically in front of everyone until he disintegrates into ash, his life taken. The knight remarks, "He chose poorly."

Then, Indiana Jones goes to select what he believes is the holy grail, choosing a simple, understated goblet hidden among the others. Grabbing it, he remarks, "That's the cup of a carpenter." Then, he drinks from it, and the knight remarks, "You have chosen wisely."

The bad guy, with evil motives, assumes a heavenly King would have the same desire for riches and lavish treasures as earthly kings and selects a cup that reflects his own personal preferences. But he chose poorly.

In our text today, we encounter another man, an earthly king, who also presumes to know what God wants and that it will be the same things he, as king, wants. But God says, "You've chosen poorly." Thankfully, he doesn't turn into a pile of ash.

II.

We find King David in our text today after he has finally risen to power as the new king of Israel. He made the city of Jerusalem his new capital, and brought the ark of the covenant, the ark of God, a sacred relic of the Israelites representing the very presence of God, to its new home in Jerusalem.

Verse one tells us David is living in his house, a big fancy palace fit for a king, at rest from all his enemies. But in his fancy palace, something is bugging David. The house for the ark of the Covenant, where the God of Israel abides, is a simple tent of goat skin curtains made by Moses. So, David gets a thought: is a tent a good enough home for the Lord who has delivered Israel through turbulent times? This God deserves a temple.

Sounds pure of heart, doesn't it? God has done so much for God's people. God deserves something grand and regal. Perhaps it was pure of heart. But maybe there was also a smidge of self-serving motivation in David's desire to build God a house. You see, most rulers and kings of David's time had a royal deity housed nearby. Perhaps David could give legitimacy to his kingdom by building a big fancy temple for God to show God was with them and at his beck and call.

David shares his grand vision with the prophet, Nathan, who without skipping a beat or stopping to pray, becomes the yes man for the King's vision.

III.

Isn't this a temptation we all wrestle with? Pure motives vs. selfish motives. Our vision vs. God's vision. We love God. We recognize all God has done for us. We want to honor God. We think we might now best how to do that, but we chose the cup we prefer and presume God must like it, too. Author Anne Lamott is famous for saying, "You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do." Like David, perhaps a part of us wants to keep God confined in a structure, not of stone, but of rules and beliefs and behaviors, that give us a feeling of control, power, and a sense that God validates what we want validated.

Matters of social justice can create this tension. The desire for justice is a healthy one, one that mirrors God's heart for justice. But there can be some self-serving elements there, too. We want to help, but we want it to happen in a certain way and through certain means. We want to give dollars without investing in systemic change that is needed. The box for how God can show up for the cause of justice is made smaller and smaller by us, prevent God from doing new and surprising things beyond our wildest imaginations. But God pushes back on our visions when they don't align with God's vision.

And this is the case for David. David and Nathan are ready to proceed with construction when God tells the prophet Nathan to put a stop to it. "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?'" (vv.5-7)

When I read this part of the text, I picture this disappointed guy from meme fame whose picture is the perfect image of disappointment. Notice how God addresses David— not as King, but as God’s servant. You can almost hear God saying, “Listen, kid. You need to stay in your lane. You’ve chosen poorly, caught up in your vision rather than seeking what I want. I’ve never asked anyone, including you, to build a house for me. I move with my people. I do as I please. I’m not a genie in a bottle nor a prop to validate your agenda or kingdom. I am the provider. You are the recipient. And to help you remember this, let me remind you what all I have done for my people and for you, MY servant David.

So, God continues through the prophet Nathan, saying, “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,” (vv.8-9a)

If you listen closely, friends, you’ll hear a mic dropped by the Lord. Listen, you little snot-nose kid. I brought you out of the pasture. You were following sheep and now you’re the prince over my people. Who did that? I did. Not you. Your enemies have been cut off. Who did that? You and your little slingshot? No. I did.

I’ve always been there with you, David. And I still am. And now, you’re going to build me a house? Wrong. I’m going to build a house for YOU, and it’s a house with a twist. It won’t be made of stone. It will be made up of people.

God continues through Nathan saying, “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.”.... “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.” (vv.9b-11, 16)

IV.

It would be very difficult to pick a more fitting text for this last Sunday of Advent. After focusing with a growing sense of expectation on the coming of God’s salvation, we are just a few hours away from our celebration of the birth of the long-promised Messiah. This text in 2 Samuel is “the mother of all Messianic prophecies,” “the fountainhead of all messianic hopes.” It is the promise at the heart of Gabriel’s Advent message to the Virgin Mary as recorded in Luke 1:31-33 which says, “And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

This promise was given to King David in the best of times when it didn’t seem necessary, and it was fulfilled in the worst of times under Roman oppression when it didn’t seem possible.ⁱ

V.

Psalm 89 was likely composed during a difficult time of captivity, when Israel began to doubt God's enduring promise to care for them. They sang this song to remind the people of the promise God had made that God would forever be their God, and they would be God's people. To remember God had made God's home in them, and it would never end, even when the eventual temple was destroyed, even when the ark of God was captured by enemies, even when earthly kingdoms come and go. It would have been a psalm song in the synagogues of Mary's childhood, by Mary herself.

I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David: 'I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations. Psalm 89:1-4

After Gabriel's announcement that she would give birth to Jesus, the Son of the Most High, the one to whom will be given the throne of David and whose kingdom will never end, Mary sings a new song with hints of Psalm 89 woven in: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant....He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." (Luke 1:46-55) God made a promise. God was keeping that promise.

VI.

The people of God thought they knew what cup God would use to establish God's kingdom on earth, but God had a twist. It was not the wealthy, ornate cup of political power and earthly kings and kingdoms they had envisioned and hoped for. It was the humble cup of an infant child named Jesus who ushered in the greatest reversal – the powerful brought down, the lowly lifted up, the hungry fed, the rich turned away.

We still struggle with holding fast to our own visions about how we think God should act and work in our lives and world. We reach for our preferred cup, but God says hold up! Remember, I am God, you are not. I'm the One who has been steadfast in faithfulness, you have not. I've always been with you. And I still am. The only one building a house is me, and it's a house with a twist. It isn't made of stone or political parties or power. It is made of people, and Jesus will reign over this house forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. God builds the house, and God establishes the kingdom. We announce, seek, receive, and bear witness to the kingdom of God in unique and holy ways, but God builds it. We join God as the people of God, in whom God dwells, by being completely open to discerning where the Spirit is moving, grabbing hold, and moving with it, setting our preferred cups down to take up the cup of Jesus.

No matter what happens, God is with us. We belong to God. God is at work in all our chaotic times and in the brokenness of our world. God is not absent from our mess but moved right into it. That is what we will celebrate tonight. Jesus will be King, no matter who sits on the throne of any earthly nation. And that should give us deep comfort and high hope. That should lead us to sing along with Mary, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior ... He has come to the aid of his child, Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” Amen.

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All scripture quoted is from the NRSVUE unless otherwise noted.

Romans 16:25-27

ⁱ <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2020-12-14/2-samuel-71-11-16-3/>