

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost – Jared Busby

2 Samuel 7:1-14a; Psalm 89:20-37; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

It's a good thing we are in the midst of Ordinary Time in our liturgical calendar, because these passages are it. When you look up the passage in Mark, the heading above verse 30 is, "Feeding the Five Thousand." My disappointment was palpable when the selection cut off immediately before anyone started eating, but there isn't much I can do about it. The lectionary says verses 30-34, and I am not one to question the accumulated authority of all the people who spent all that time deciding and following it before me. Plus that's only the first section of the reading, and familiarity with the book of Mark (or, in my case, a glance ahead) revealed that the very next heading says, "Jesus Walks on the Water." Then, of course, right after Jesus gets in the boat with the disciples, and they fail to understand whatever they should have, the second part of our Gospel reading for today picks up.

At this point, I went to look up the appointed passages for this week, to make sure there wasn't some kind of mistake. Or maybe those who preach regularly were pulling some kind of joke on me, a light hazing, like the sermon version of snipe hunting.

I discovered that was not the case, and I was going to have to do something: Plan A – I tried to call Judy to tell her that I was going to be sick until late Sunday afternoon, but she didn't answer, so... ; Plan B – write something anyway.

I learned, in the course of my education as a creative writer, that when I was having a hard time figuring out what to write about, I could write about having a hard time figuring out what to write about, and it either turned out to be a good story, or at least primed the pump for something else. So I asked myself, I said, "Self, what is it that you are finding difficult about this Gospel passage?" Unfortunately, I was not very forthcoming.

That was when I decided to turn to our Old Testament passage. It's from 2nd Samuel. I've always loved King David stuff, ever since I was a kid and watched a VHS cartoon a million times, where he drops Goliath with one stone... (and they didn't show it, but I knew he chopped his head off right afterward); then everybody in Jerusalem was yelling something I didn't quite understand about one thousand and ten thousand, but it was such a great story I didn't care! Not to mention last week's reading immediately precedes this one, and it is chock full of Davidic shenanigans.

I couldn't help but see the heading above chapter 7 reads, "Nathan's Oracle." I've always liked Nathan. He's a good prophet. He certainly doesn't pull any punches on David about the Bathsheba thing. Then I dove in and found a passage about David NOT building the Temple.

So... obviously... I turned to Ephesians. As I've gotten older, I have developed a more sophisticated sense of humor, or I never could have appreciated a great deal of the literature that I studied in college. Fortunately, the sense of humor I had when I was 8 or 10 years old has not been diminished in any way by that process. That being said, when I turned to Ephesians, I first had to stop giggling over the number of times the author manages to cram the word "circumcision" into the first sentence.

I fought through it, and read the rest of the New Testament reading, and finally found something. I have the strength of Connectedness. That means that what I find in the lectionary will undoubtedly exist in the intersections, and overlaps of the passages.

In Ephesians, as in 2nd Samuel, the passage talks about NOT building a temple, though the perspective is different. Nathan initially tells David, *Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you*. It's not difficult, with our ears, and imaginations, to hear that with the sarcastic tone that an exasperated parent sometimes gets with a child who has recently started a big project, and stopped multiple times leaving it where it lay, and then when it's done danced into the house in their underwear to tell you about their next big project they want to start.

“Go (Fine). Do all that you have in mind (do whatever you want); for the Lord is with you (What do I know? I'm just His prophet).”

If parents do that they might hurt their child's feelings (if the child noticed it at all), or spend a few minutes feeling guilty when they think about it later. I'm sure Nathan, on the other hand, jumped up with a start that night and began to pray, spontaneously and fervently. “GOOD LORD,” he said. “What have I done?! I set that idiot shepherd loose to build a temple. Our enemies have just been cut off from us. We're going to have some rest from fighting. The last thing we need to do is try and slap together a temple from whatever's laying around, according to blueprints drawn up by this kid fresh from the pasture. I've got a feeling that the Lord is going to ‘saith thus’ unto me before the morning.”

Sure enough, the building project gets passed on to David's son. David was worried because he thought his house was the one he built of cedar that keeps the rain off of his head, while the Ark was out in a tent. Well, the Lord then uses a wonderful pun, trying to teach him that the true House of David was the family line that would continue to grow forever, not the physical structure.

Of course, God is more concerned with the eternal in his own case as well, even though God sanctions the temple built by Solomon later. The wooden house that David built is no more the true House of David than the Temple Solomon built is the true House of the Lord. This doesn't mean that these things were without value. They work like a map; having a map of the place to which you are going is not the same as being there, but without it you might never find your way.

It is later that we begin to understand the truth of these things. In fact, the Temple built by Solomon is, in a sense, the *dividing wall* spoken of in Ephesians—that which separates one group from another, artificially, where God would have one new humanity. It tells us quite clearly of the nature of the true House of the Lord.

Guess what.

It's metaphorical.

In many ways it can be understood in terms of the physical temple that stood in Jerusalem, except in one fundamental case. That temple was made of walls that separated. It separated one space from another. It separated the Jews from the Gentiles, the priests from the laypeople, men from women, and so on. In this respect, the true House of the Lord is the opposite. Maybe the author of Ephesians is still stuck in his own traditions a little bit, when he writes, *he has broken down the dividing wall*.

I think it goes beyond breaking down the dividing wall. If, through the cross, Christ had merely punched holes in the wall and invited everyone inside the temple, it wouldn't be enough. Even if the temple were expanded to fit all the world, and had no doors that could close, still... it would not be enough. The true House of the Lord is not created by breaking down walls, or opening doors. It requires more than easier access, and more space. Rather, the true House of the Lord requires that the

temple be taken and turned inside out. Then there is no such thing as “outside” the true House of the Lord.

The walls of the old house were built by connecting together bricks to separate one thing from another. In the new House the walls are built by connecting together people so that nothing is separate.

The disciples are given a glimpse of this, whether they recognize it or not, in the passage from Mark. They have been busy. They are hungry, and tired. Christ tells them to *come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.*

When they come to the place where they are to be separate from the people, what do they find? The people are already there waiting.

They cross the sea and they are waiting there too. They find the sick—those who have been walled off and separated out. They are left untouched, except by Christ, and with the smallest contact their primary affliction is cured.

We must then ask ourselves, not from what, or whom are we separated. There is no such thing. We must ask ourselves, instead, from what or whom do we try to be separated.

I'd like to leave you with one of my favorite poems. It is called, “Mending Wall” by Robert Frost.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbour know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
“Stay where you are until our backs are turned!”
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across and eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, “Good fences make good neighbours.”
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder

If I could put a notion in his head:
“*Why* do they make good neighbours? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.” I could say “Elves” to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, “Good fences make good neighbours.”