

Community Through Partnership – Tori Paulin

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

Ahh David... If you were in attendance last week we learned that it is actually very easy to hate a king who was appointed by God. I'm not going to lie, I didn't want to continue with David, because my resentful feelings and unforgivable words like murderer and rapist will not stop floating in my head. But after sitting with our gospel text and Pauline passage I was able to see a little light through the dark and narrow tunnel of David's authority. God is up to something here. In 2nd Samuel we continue with David, this time with a friend and prophet, Nathan. Here you have David sitting with Nathan reflecting on his personal decision to toss around the ark of God, remember the tents? So he says to Nathan, "Why am I *living in a house of cedar* (which is a nicer facility) while the *ark of God* is hanging out *in a tent*?" (Not the greatest form of shelter?)

Nathan responds by saying, "You're right, man, if you're thinking you want to do something about this, like build a better space, you go for it—you can do anything." But that's not exactly what God had in mind... Soon after, the prophet Nathan receives a word from God. In this God says something along the lines of, "Ummm, actually, David will not be building anything." Personally, I think the reasoning behind this is because David has too much blood on his hands, and the simple fact that he's mean to women, but that's just me. Nathan learns that David cannot build this place for God after all and God continues by saying, "I am indeed preparing a great nation, a home, to be built up through your children. (I'm thinking David's family.) This home will be a place where my people cannot be disturbed, and in the long run he (meaning Jesus) will build a house for my name"—but through David's lineage. So Nathan hears this and now has to go tell egotistical David that he was wrong, and in fact cannot do whatever he wants.

At first when I read this story I was thinking, "Ok, so David's son is going to build this house to dwell in and David ultimately provides a good chunk of money to fund it. Great, everyone has a part." The Includer in me was very satisfied. (It's my number four on the StrengthsFinder.)

After recently hearing a message on the prophetic I am learning that when someone receives a word from God we, in turn, uncover something about God's nature, which is not always written in black and white in the text. So we have some discerning to do. After sitting with this story God's words for Nathan opened my eyes to two things: I was intrigued by the level of intimacy God is able to reach in order to connect with his people. I was also fascinated by the way God invites his people into relationship with him and one another to be a part of something great. In this example a prophetic word to Nathan was granted to King David as a message that something big is going to be created. God is inviting David, and indirectly all people, to take part in the creation of a new kingdom, even in the midst of the interesting reign of David. It may not be the way David had planned, but it excites me to see God inviting David not simply to do something

on his own or tell others to do it, but to be a partner with God and create something that is beautiful, something safe, and something permanent for all people. God is speaking through Nathan and is offering this radical invitation to enter into both an emotional and hands-on partnership with God; I believe we are given the same “Save The Date” instructions every day. (Sorry, I’m engaged, so I can use wedding words.) God forms community through many partnerships with Israel throughout the entire Old Testament, and in Samuel he promises to provide a forever home built on Christ that will now include more people. Now my Includer strength is even more thrilled!

In our conjoining texts today we also see God continue to build up great nations in community through even more intimate partnerships, this time forming a new community specifically founded, and formed through the redemptive work of his son, Jesus. In Ephesians 2 we find Paul reconciling the Jews and Gentiles together by allowing them into a space of freedom and safety to just love one another. He invites two different groups of people to partner in community together by saying, “You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on *the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.*” In Mark 6, the feeding of the 5,000 is a classic story of Jesus. Here we’re actually reading right before the action, where Jesus’ community of disciples is relying heavily on their intimate partnership with Jesus to learn how to “do life” with not only him but with the rest of their community. Jesus prepared the disciples by gathering them together on a boat and being near them. They found rest in his presence. Then he helped them feed the crowd of thousands and then themselves. Soon after the disciples and Jesus entered a town where Jesus continued to heal all who were able to come near to him. It is very clear that God is not stopping his partnership with humanity. This is evident through the longevity of God’s partnership with Israel, all the way to Jesus’s relationship with his disciples.

These stories help paint us a beautiful picture of Jesus preparing God’s people a place in the forever kingdom of heaven while, at the same time, partnering with us and one another for this home. God’s not trying to show off here, God didn’t need those people to build a new kingdom of God. It’s very crazy to me to see the level of humility God shows us by basically asking us to take part in a community so loving and freeing. Community being formed is not something we can just leave sit in its biblical time zone. We must look at God’s partnerships with those in the Old Testament as well as Christ’s new community with both Jews and Gentiles and the disciples, and really figure out who we are partnering with in our everyday lives, and how we discern our part in this new community. At work, school, or even our homes, what does that look like?

I met a woman last week who, after knowing me for ten minutes, was comfortable enough to tell me that she had moved from New Jersey to Greenville by bus (19 hours) with nothing but her one suitcase of clothes (because she had gotten rid of everything else she owned) and her

five-year-old and two-year-old daughters. I asked her why she came to Greenville? She said, "I'm looking for a fresh start. I've been here for a week and there's not really a whole lot to do." So we started talking about how with little to do in this town there are a lot of people who actually want to get to know you. It's one of the reasons my fiancé and I had stuck around post-college. I explained that here we take people to coffee and ask how their day has been. If it has sucked, we take them out for ice cream later that week, or leave them chocolates on their front porch, or an encouraging text or letter. That may be a little too nice. But this town is so small and friendly that you can't really go into one of the ten little shops and restaurants and four gas stations and not know someone, without waving or seeing a familiar smile. She was shocked. She could not believe that people could be kind like that. I said, "Oh yes, with little to do here we are kind of forced to 'do life' with people." Again...shocked. She had never heard of "doing life" with the people in her community before. She was very used to not knowing a single person; if you did, you knew all their dirty laundry and were hiding from an uncomfortable conversation with them.

My favorite part about this is knowing that God doesn't need our help to accomplish anything. God invites us, his children, to come and know his nature a little more by simply holding hands with the person next to us, and asking them how they're doing or what kind of coffee they like. Or my personal favorite, "What's been the best part of your day?" (Positivity is my number one on StrengthsFinder so it's in my nature to ask that.)

We are invited to forever know and love God through community and partnership with one another. God is providing our community a project right now in our community to take part in the creation of something beautiful, a home, one that should be ready in 2019.

Jim Reinhard is one of the coolest people I've ever met. If you don't know him, you should. But 35 years ago Jim began a very special partnership with God and his community. No, I'm not talking about with his sweet wife Marilyn (who, again, is someone you need to know). I'm talking about a place called The Simple Room. Jim began this partnership in 1988 by sleeping outside in a tent (hmmm—what else was kept in a tent?). He set up outside of the Dining Commons up here at the University to raise money for The Simple Room, and would not leave until the amount was raised (I think he wanted \$200 a day or \$1000). A youth development program that seeks out all children to come and know God can only be created by God and because of God. But Jim was able to partner with God and his community, students, and people who didn't really want him sleeping in a tent, to create a home for what is now one of my favorite places in the world. While The Simple Room has moved into several different locations throughout the years, and while it has seen many children and leaders come in and out of its doors, 35 years later The Simple Room has broken ground and is in process of building a new home that is going to be beautiful, safe, and permanent.

The idea of a new community that builds the kingdom of God empowers me to be a part of something bigger than myself. And thank goodness, I don't have to do it alone. I hope it fuels you in a similar way. Now if that means financially donating to the Simple Room's building fund, so be it! But my prayer is for us to honor God's promise of a new and great nation—to be partners with the Lord and each other to build community while creating something beautiful for the forever kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.