



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

October 31, 2021

1 Kings 5:1-5; 8:1-13 Solomon builds a Temple

I want you to think about the sanctuary of Two Rivers United Methodist Church. Think about the great stained glass windows, the high ceilings with long wooden pews. See the wooden artistry in the front of the sanctuary with the deep red curtain framing the cross. See the old marble baptistry and the angles on the Communion rail.

Upon entering the sanctuary it is difficult to not stop for a moment and take it all in. It feels holy. It feels as if it is a special place from the moment you walk in. Why is the sanctuary holy? Is it because of the beautiful architecture and decorative wood, or is there something more to it?

When you ponder the holiness of that place, I venture to guess there is more to it than the visual beauty. There memories attached to it as well. There is the sound of music that fills the room. You may be able to hear the pipe organ blasting a triumphal fanfare or the choir share a moving anthem. Perhaps you can hear the bells in synchronized harmony or the off key beauty of children singing bravely.

Maybe you remember the words that have been shared there. The Word that is read and the Word that is proclaimed by preachers. Do you remember a time you were convicted by Scripture or inspired by an impassioned lesson?

Above all, recall the people who joined you there. The great Communion of Saints who filled the pews with hospitality and friendship. Perhaps you watched your family grow in those pews, your children wed on the chancel, your grandchildren baptized in the font.

Solomon's Temple was built to be a dwelling place for God. Yet even Solomon knew that the Temple could not contain the Creator of the Universe. The Temple was a place where people could come and be renewed by its holiness. They could hear the Instruction of God, participate in the ritual sacrifices which led to glorification of God and restoration of community. The Temple was meant to be a place where people came together.

This is why Solomon is known as wise: he chose peace over war. He was allowed to build the Temple because he cooperated with neighboring kingdoms instead of waging on them. Yet Solomon was imperfect. The story of 1 Kings reminds us that Solomon used conscripted labor to build the Temple. He forced Israelites and gentiles alike into aiding this

large project. Soon after Solomon died, his kingdom was divided. People from the north, appealing to Solomon's son thought, "now that Solomon is dead perhaps his son will treat us better." They hoped that Solomon's son would end the conscripted labor and harsh taxes. They were wrong. Instead, Rehoboam said, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will make your yoke still heavier; my father punished you with whips, but I will punish you with scourges."

The people rebelled. The United Kingdom divided into a Northern Kingdom (Israel) and Southern Kingdom (Judah), and the Temple was an important symbol of the division. Instead of being a house of God's dwelling and a center for peace and encouragement, for many it was the emblem of harsh treatment and persecution.

What makes a sanctuary holy? God's presence. It is the felt presence of the Spirit that comes to us in music, preaching, fellowship, and ritual. Worship is meant to be a time to connect to the Holy Spirit, be refreshed by her power and move out into the world refreshed. The place is holy because of the visual beauty, but also because of the Spiritual vitality. A church is meant to be a place of Spiritual significance and presence.

For many however, the church is an emblem of exile and ostracization. It is a reminder of being left out, with its large imposing walls of cold rock and heavy doors. For many, entering a church is an incredible act of courage because they have been hurt before. They have been taught a fearful message that is bound in shame. They have been subjected to overt discrimination or silent, passive, implicit racism.

May our church and the people who fill it always be mindful of this distinction. When the Church is a place of holiness, it is a gathering of compassionate, hospitable people who welcome the stranger, aid the sick and the poor, feed the hungry, and offer friendship to the ostracized. When churches fail, it is often because they worship the walls instead of the God who fills it. They are dedicated to maintenance of a place or institution instead of the mission of Christ's kingdom.

Be encouraged people of God. God's holiness exists both within and outside of the sanctuary. God's people are doing God's mission in Two Rivers Church. We will continue to find God in in church as long as we remember God's holiness can never be contained just there.