

5 Because King Hiram of Tyre was loyal to David throughout his rule, Hiram sent his servants to Solomon when he heard that Solomon had become king after his father. 2 Solomon sent the following message to Hiram: 3 “You know that my father David wasn’t able to build a temple for the name of the Lord my God. This was because of the enemies that fought him on all sides until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet. 4 Now the Lord my God has given me peace on every side, without enemies or misfortune. 5 So I’m planning to build a temple for the name of the Lord my God, just as the Lord indicated to my father David, ‘I will give you a son to follow you on your throne. He will build the temple for my name.’ 6 Now give the order and have the cedars of Lebanon cut down for me. My servants will work with your servants. I’ll pay your servants whatever price you set, because you know we have no one here who is skilled in cutting wood like the Sidonians.”

7 years later...

8:22 Solomon stood before the Lord’s altar in front of the entire Israelite assembly and, spreading out his hands toward the sky, 23 he said: Lord God of Israel, there’s no god like you in heaven above or on earth below. You keep the covenant and show loyalty to your servants who walk before you with all their heart. 24 This is the covenant you kept with your servant David, my father, which you promised him. Today, you have fulfilled what you promised. 25 So now, Lord, Israel’s God, keep what you promised my father David, your servant, when you said to him, “You will never fail to have a successor sitting on Israel’s throne as long as your descendants carefully walk before me just as you walked before me.” 26 So now, God of Israel, may your promise to your servant David, my father, come true.

27 But how could God possibly live on earth? If heaven, even the highest heaven, can’t contain you, how can this temple that I’ve built contain you? 28 Lord my God, listen to your servant’s prayer and request, and hear the cry and prayer that your servant prays to you today. 29 Constantly watch over this temple, the place about which you said, “My name will be there,” and listen to the prayer that your servant is praying toward this place. 30 Listen to the request of your servant and your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Listen from your heavenly dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive!

41 Listen also to the immigrant who isn’t from your people Israel but who comes from a distant country because of your reputation— 42 because they will hear of your great reputation, your great power, and your outstretched arm. When the immigrant comes and prays toward this temple, 43 then listen from heaven, where you live, and do everything the immigrant asks. Do this so that

all the people of the earth may know your reputation and revere you, as your people Israel do, and recognize that this temple I have built bears your name.

52 Open your eyes to your servant's request and to the request of your people Israel. Hear them whenever they cry out to you. 53 You set them apart from all the earth's peoples as your own inheritance, Lord, just as you promised through your servant Moses when you brought our ancestors out of Egypt.

54 As soon as Solomon finished praying and making these requests to the Lord, he got up from before the Lord's altar, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out to heaven. 55 He stood up and blessed the whole Israelite assembly in a loud voice: 56 "May the Lord be blessed! He has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. He hasn't neglected any part of the good promise he made through his servant Moses. 57 May the Lord our God be with us, just as he was with our ancestors. May he never leave us or abandon us. 58 May he draw our hearts to him to walk in all his ways and observe his commands, his laws, and his judgments that he gave our ancestors. 59 And may these words of mine that I have cried out before the Lord remain near to the Lord our God day and night so that he may do right by his servant and his people Israel for each day's need, 60 and so that all the earth's peoples may know that the Lord is God. There is no other God! **-Common English Bible**

We're focusing this month on the metaphor of being "knit together," remembering how God has knit each of us complex beings together in particular ways and how God by Christ's Spirit has knit all of us together into a greater whole, reflecting on the warmth and strength gained from being stitched together in community. Last week we were at tables together rolling a ball of yarn around and sharing stories of experiences that have knit us into this community as we created webs to symbolize the threads that connect us. This week we're back in the beautiful sanctuary where we have worshiped God, received the Word and bread and cup, passed the peace, where people have been baptized, confirmed, ordained, married, and memorialized ... countless times. And in this space many prayers have been lifted. This has been a place of prayer. One could say that prayer is a powerful tool for stitching us together – connecting us to each other and to Christ.

And for our reflection today we are offered excerpts from the Book of 1 Kings. We've once again raced ahead— when last we were on our narrative journey through the Hebrew Bible we heard of the birth of Samuel, the first great prophet of Israel,

Please note: actual sermon content may vary from this manuscript at time of delivery.

who anointed Israel's first kings— Saul and David. Today though, we pick up many years later after David has died and his grown son Solomon has ascended the throne. We skipped over much turbulence and family drama and are picking up at a moment of relative peace and stability which Solomon has determined to be the ideal time to finally build a temple for God. And he initiates that process by asking a foreign king to send him the wood he needs to get the job done. We then skipped over 7 years of heavy labor in which that wood and other resources were deployed to build Israel's first temple in Jerusalem. And we listened in on several excerpts from a very long prayer Solomon prays in dedication of the temple.

Again and again throughout this prayer Solomon calls on God to listen— to him, to the people, and even to immigrants, foreigners who find themselves drawn to this temple and this God. It seems he understands the temple to be a place of prayer, perhaps for all people. The temple played many roles throughout its history, but surely it was always this, a place of prayer. One scholar that I listened to this week took from Solomon's prayer the idea that the temple is a place of mutual listening— the people listen for the word of God and call upon God to listen to their prayers.

There's a tension in the passage between the transcendence and the immanence of God. Solomon wanted to build the temple as a house for God, but rightly realizes that no building could ever contain God. There are even several suggestions throughout the Hebrew Bible that God didn't want a temple built, nor did God want Israel to have a king. These are human constructions. Somehow we need such things — identified human leaders and designated holy spaces. God doesn't need these things. But we seem to. God is both near, as near as the very breath we breathe— immanent. And far— filling and exceeding all time and space— transcendent. We have a hard time with transcendence. That both things could be true necessarily defies our full comprehension. This is part of why we are so vulnerable to idolatry, to reducing God to something we can see and understand.

I also think there's a tension in the passage between Israel, the people of God, and the foreigner or immigrant. This holy space could only be built with contributions from outside Israel. And ultimately this holy space would be a gathering space for far more than just Israelites. Within both Judaism and Christianity there's an emphasis

Please note: actual sermon content may vary from this manuscript at time of delivery.

on the chosen character of our communities and the particular and special relationship we have with the divine. But within our sacred texts there is also an emphasis on being chosen in order to serve the wider world. Perhaps you remember the covenant with Abraham— God promised that all the families of the earth would be blessed in him. Perhaps you remember Jesus' words in John three about God's love of the world, or kosmos. There is a tension in our traditions between the particular and the universal and I see this tension here in these excerpts as well. It is very easy to get overly focused on the particular, the love that God has for us, the gift of community God has given us, and to lose sight of God's love for all.

I don't want us to let our stewardship metaphor lead us to make an idol of our church community nor to be overly focused on the coziness of the little family of faith who gathers at Sunset and Dosch. Yes, we have been knit together and we draw warmth and strength from our connections. We are called into prayer and we grow in faith through our encounters with God in this place and in these people. But in truth we are knit together with Christians across time and space, with Presbyterians all throughout the Presbytery of Cascades who will gather next weekend in Ashland, Oregon, with Cubans struggling with power loss and hurricanes, with Ukrainians keeping the faith in a war zone, with American Evangelicals whom we do not understand and sometimes do not appreciate, with those who have gone before us and those who will come after us, and many more. And surely all the Christians are knit together in order to bring warmth and comfort to all people in every time and place. If we are an unfathomably large, multi-colored, multi-sized blanket, we are such to blanket the world with love.

I know, it doesn't feel like we are so united. Life in 2024 feels incredibly fragmented. There are plenty of people who call themselves Christian with whom we want no association. There are probably even people in our own congregation with whom it is hard for us to connect. But the truth is we are connected, through the waters of baptism, through the common table, through the word of God proclaimed in our midst, by the Spirit— whether we want to be or not.

Just this week my mom shared a quote from Jimmy Carter on her Facebook page about the fact that homosexuality was a known phenomenon in the ancient world and

Please note: actual sermon content may vary from this manuscript at time of delivery.

the Roman Empire and Jesus had absolutely nothing to say about it. Jesus never condemned it. A long time acquaintance of my mom's reacted very negatively to this post insisting that the Bible is clear that homosexuality is a sin and that her true church teaches we are to hate the sin and love the sinner. My mother staunchly disagrees. My mother asked me if the Bible clearly condemns homosexuality and I told her that there are 7 references to same gender sexual encounters in the scriptures and all of them are negative. But whether the Bible is speaking about covenanted same-gender partnerships in any of these seven verses is highly unclear and probably unlikely, and certainly Jesus offers no teachings on same-gender sexuality. All of the verses, and really there aren't many of them, need interpretation in their own historical context, and few of them offer useful insight into contemporary questions.

Somehow, these two women, with their radically different interpretations of God's will, are part of one body, knit together by the Spirit. But it would be entirely possible for both women to retreat to their separate fellowships and presume each has a corner on the truth. This is the world we're living in, right?

I want St. A's to witness to something bigger, to a God who overcomes our petty and our meaningful differences, to a God who heals broken relationships, broken hearts, and a broken world. St. A's, like the temple, is a dwelling place for God and a place for prayer. So please join me in prayer for this. And please pray for the will to make commitments to share generously what you have so this might be so.

Resources in addition to scripture that influenced the writing of this sermon:

Amy Robertson and Robert Williamson, Jr. "Episode 609: Dedicating the Temple (1 Kings 5:1-6; 8:22-30; 41-43;52-60a)" on their *BibleWorm Podcast*, <https://www.biblewormpodcast.com/e/episode-609-dedicating-the-temple-1-kings-51-6-822-30-41-43-52-60a/>