

"The Lord Will Make You a House"

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December 24, 2023

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." ³Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you." ⁴But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I 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. ⁷Wherever 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?"

⁸Now 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; ⁹and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And 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, ¹¹from 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. . . . ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. (2 Samuel 7:1-11,16)

As we continue our journey through Advent at the Movies, the movie lens we will use today is the 1990 film *Home Alone*. Most of you know the plot well. Eight-year-old Kevin McAllister is accidentally left behind when his family takes off to Paris for Christmas. All alone in his house, he experiences a wide range of feelings, beginning with joyful freedom at having no one around to tell him what to do. But as threats emerge -- from the dark and mysterious neighbor next door to the two burglars who are working the block -- loneliness, fear, and vulnerability creep in.

My favorite scene is comes as Kevin is walking home on Christmas Eve. Missing his family, he had gone to ask a neighborhood Santa Claus for one gift. He wants no toys or presents -- all he asks is to get his family back. As he walks home through the snow, he passes a church. The sounds of "O Holy Night" being sung by a children's choir can be faintly heard, even from the sidewalk. Pausing a moment, he decides to go inside. The sanctuary is calm and peaceful, full of light and the beautiful music of the choir. Sitting down in a pew, Kevin is shocked to see the fearful neighbor sitting across the aisle. They end up having an honest and heartfelt conversation about regret, grace, and overcoming fear -- an exchange made possible by the welcome, warmth, safety, and peace that Kevin and his neighbor find in God's house. Fortified and emboldened by those moments, Kevin runs home with courage and passion. Fear is gone, leaving only resolve. As he deadbolts the front door behind him, he turns and proclaims, "This is my house, I have to defend it."

As I have said before, the language of Advent is the language of the prophets, and the prophets did not shy away from the challenges and difficulties of life. Israel's prophets



could be harsh critics, pointing accusatory fingers at God's people and shaming them for their sins and lack of faith. But the prophets also expressed great faith and hope in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – faith that the things that are wrong in this world will someday be made right... hope that crooked paths will be made straight and rocky patches smoothed out, that those who grieve will be comforted, and all will be made well.

Many of these hopes focused on our deep need for home – a place for us that is safe and secure. Even as the prophet Isaiah warned Israel that it would be punished for its faithfulness, he also looked ahead to the time when justice and righteousness and peace would be restored. “You will know that time has come,” the prophet said, because you will *“abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.”*¹ Invading armies may scatter you, the prophet Zechariah said, but God will bring you home.² Pain and suffering may exist for a time, said the psalmist, but *“those who sow in tears [will] reap with shouts of joy,”* and *“those who go out weeping... shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.”*³ Again and again, the songs of the psalms look to God to give them refuge, a fortress, a solid rock on which to stand. And again and again, God promises to give them these things, to shelter the people like a mother bird wraps her young in her strong wings.

In the passage we read this morning from Second Samuel, King David is feeling this kind of peace and security. He is now settled in a grand house of cedar and, at least for the moment, the battles and conflicts have ended. Through the prophet Nathan, God assures the king that all the people will also enjoy the same blessing. *“I will appoint a place for my people Israel,”* God says, *“and [I] will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more... and I will give you rest from all your enemies... [I] will make you a house... Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.”*

I think we can all relate to these feelings, especially at this time of year. I love the feeling I get when the tree makes the whole house smell like pine, when the glow of Christmas lights casts a peaceful warmth, when our children are home and we can sit around the dining room table together or do a puzzle together. When we think of home, we think of a place where we can feel welcome, comfortable, and safe.

We know, however, that four walls and a roof over our heads do not insure security and safety. The people of Israel and Gaza know this all too well. The people of Ukraine know this all too well. And even if the area is peaceful and calm, family situations may not be. Like Mary and Joseph on the way to Bethlehem, many people are still looking for a safe, warm place to rest their heads. One of the great promises of Advent is that, even if you do not currently have a home that is a refuge, a rock, or a fortress against the storm, God is working to make that a reality for all of God's people. God does not just want to make you a house; God wants you to have a home.

But there is more to the Advent message in this passage – things that God has in mind when God speaks of “home.” The first is that our home can be a place, but it is more than that. Home, as God sees it, is any place where God's people are -- wherever two or three are gathered in God's name. When God speaks about a “house,” God doesn't mean a building. God is talking about a people, a family.

¹ Isaiah 32:16-18.

² Zechariah 10:9-10.

³ Psalm 126:5-6.

This also tells us something about the nature of God. You may have noticed that King David's big plan to build God a house started with guilt. He looked around and saw the grand structure that he called home, but there was no similar structure for God. David felt guilty about that, and wanted to change that. But God, if you listened carefully, did not affirm that plan... at least not at this point. *"When did I ever ask you for a house of cedar?"* God replies. *"I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt."* God will appoint a place for David and God's people, but God wants to remain mobile. We have a need to settle down in one place, but God never settles down. The Spirit, Christ says, blows where it will. *"What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ... The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes."*⁴

That being said, there is one place where scripture says that God did choose to abide, a home where the full glory and presence of God chose to dwell. The gospel of John summarizes the entirety of the Christmas miracle in one phrase -- "the Word took on flesh and dwelt among us." Literally speaking, the Greek that we translate as "dwelt among us" is more accurately "tabernacled with us," or even more familiarly, "pitched a tent with us." Our God cannot be contained in buildings built with hands, but the eternal God wants so badly to be with us and close to us – to protect us, defend us, comfort us, and love us – that the full divinity of God pitched a tent in the world in the form of a babe in a manger. And in that way, God abides with us still.

For all those who have, who know, or who are seeking a place of welcome, warmth, safety, and peace... a fortress where fears subside and courage takes root... be assured of this biblical promise: *"the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house... and in that home, you will never be alone. Amen.*

⁴ John 3:6-8.