

## “Sacred Spaces”

The Rev. Drew Willard  
UCC at The Villages, FL  
July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
8<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pentecost

2 Samuel 7:1- 14<sup>a</sup>

Mark 6:30-34;53-56

[The Prophet Nathan said to King David,]

*This is what the Lord of heavenly forces says:*

*I took you from the pasture, from following the flock, to be leader over my people Israel.*

*I've been with you wherever you've gone, and I've eliminated all your enemies before you.*

*2 Samuel 7:8-9<sup>a</sup>*

Let us pray... O God,

We give thanks for the sacred places in our lives – those we share as people of faith,  
as citizens, as human beings, and those sacred places each of us has in our hearts.

Amen

One of the most amazing applications on the Internet is the “app” for Google Earth  
which allows you to virtually visit any place on the planet

from the vantage point of satellites – and for that matter, God.

With the help of graphics that delineate roads and civic boundaries

as well as provide the names for cities and streets,

you can find houses where you lived, school campus, business,  
places you visited overseas, sacred places.

There is also an option for some areas to go to street-level

where someone literally drove through neighborhoods with cameras  
giving the effect of walking down that particular street.

It so happens the street that I grew up on, Sprague Avenue in South Plainfield, NJ,

had been uploaded that way – and at my favorite time of day for that place  
of late afternoon in the springtime.

This amazing technology allows me to enjoy a virtual homecoming

anytime I want to visit that special place that is still a sacred space for me...

What is the most ‘sacred’ space you have ever been to?

Perhaps it was a cathedral or a forest, a shrine or a beach, a graveyard or a garden,  
the white marble buildings of Washington, DC or the Grand Canyon,  
a Florida beach or a Villages golf course.

Perhaps it was the place you grew up in or the first place you owned.

Maybe it was the time of day, too, that made it holy –

like Christmas Eve at midnight or sunrise at Easter.

Maybe it was about *who* you were with

like sitting with family around the table at Thanksgiving,

or at a trysting place – a meeting place for lovers to have their first kiss.

Maybe it was to return to a place of great challenge and triumph –

like college or bootcamp, the scary hallways of middle school or the stadium,  
a mountain top or even the place you grew up in.

Willard, p.2

So, what is the most sacred space to you?

Sacred spaces can be as different and unique as there are people,  
and what is sacred for one group might be sacrilegious to another.

For example,

huge statues of Buddha can be found throughout Asia as expressions of Buddhism,  
but they could be considered 'idolatrous' according to the Bible if we took  
too narrow a reading of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the Ten Commandments.

Otherwise, we can see them as treasures that we share with all people  
as a part of our human historical heritage.

When people gather to pray – like us on Sunday mornings,  
or like our Jewish friends of Temple Shalom for their Sabbath on Friday nights,  
or like Muslims who broke their Ramadan fast this week,  
then that space becomes sanctified by what takes place in it.

When people pray, they are at their most vulnerable,  
as they open their hearts and minds to approach the Divine,  
while showing respect for those around them in the process.

Though not all human beings share the same beliefs about Ultimate Reality,  
there is a shared set of behaviors in how people of different faiths  
respond to the sacred by showing respect  
through acts of reverence, humility, sacrifice, and peace.

This is not a complete list, but stands in sharp contrast to such behaviors as  
contempt, arrogance, murder, and indiscriminate violence.

You would like to think all people would know the difference and choose the good.  
We make a sacred space - by the good there - we help to take place.

In the Gospel of Mark,

Jesus was criticized for 'working on a Sabbath' to heal someone  
which was technically a violation of religious law.

He asked his opponents,

"Which is permissible – to do something good or to do something evil?  
To save a life or take one?"

He was joking, but when he saw that they just didn't get it,  
he went and healed the person anyway while those serious religious folks  
went out to *work on* how they would destroy him, one way or another.

The hardness of people's hearts is what leads to  
contempt, arrogance, murder, and war –  
and such hard-heartedness is the unforgivable sin,  
because it excludes the opportunity to hear the truth in a given situation –  
it prevents the Spirit of God from influencing change for the good.

Willard, p.3

We have another terrible example of this in the news lately  
with the murder of five US servicemen by a gunman in Chattanooga, TN.  
Granted they were in the armed forces and they were at a military installation,  
but they weren't armed and so they were just as vulnerable as  
the nine people killed at their church Bible study in Charleston, SC.  
The Marines and sailor did not – and should not have expected to be attacked  
in the way that they were.

What seems to be a common factor in both situations of TN and SC is that  
the alleged killers were young men who appeared to be normal,  
but living lives that masked a murderous hatred.

What we don't see are the groomers who prepared them  
for political purposes that they were told were bigger than themselves,  
and justified by a perverted ethnic pride.

This kind of thing is not new for the world – or for *our* society in recent decades,  
but we must begin to address the root causes of such disaffection  
and poverty of the spirit.

Jesus said to a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well [John 4:21-24]  
that it really didn't matter whether God was worshiped in Jerusalem  
or any other traditional or sentimental place,  
but what was most important was that “... *true worshipers*  
*will worship the [Creator] in spirit and truth...*”

What does this mean?

I believe it means that to worship God ‘in spirit and truth’ is left up for each of us  
to work out in our lives – trusting that to believe in God makes sense  
and that faith has positive consequences.

I believe it means that when our worship ends on Sunday,  
our service for God begins – we take ‘church’ with us.

I don't believe that we are to live lives limited to some moral conformity  
like the Pharisees, the Taliban, and their equivalent who seek to impose  
their self-righteous interpretations,  
instead of cultivating a spiritual life guided by the love of God  
that informs our moral behavior.

So, we must be Christians from the inside out,  
and that it is just like Jesus said,  
“The Kingdom of God is in your midst” –  
God's Beloved Community is within you.  
You bring the possibilities of Heaven with you  
to make a sacred space by the good you help to take place.

Willard, p.4

The Holy Land has been in dispute longer than any of us here have been around with a legacy of terrible tragedies that would make it seem anything but 'holy'. It seems sadly ironic when the Prophet Nathan speaking for God, tells King David:

*I'm going to provide a place for my people Israel,  
and plant them so that they may live there and no longer be disturbed.*

and furthermore, this would mean that

'Cruel people will no longer trouble' Israel  
that there would be a 'rest from all [their] enemies'  
and that God would 'make a dynasty for [Israel].'

[2 Sam. 7:10-11]

Well this has yet to take place in a lasting way, but God had also promised to 'raise up [a] descendant' of David's to 'establish his kingdom', 'build a temple' in God's name, and that this would be 'forever'.

God also said,

*I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me.  
Whenever he does wrong, I will discipline him with a human rod,  
with blows from human beings.*

[2 Sam. 7:12<sup>b</sup>-14]

Historically, we understand this to refer to King David's son, Solomon, but as Christians we can see how this could also mean

Jesus as the Son of David who establishes an eternal 'kingdom' that is 'a place for [God's] people Israel' to be rooted, to grow up and live, 'and no longer be disturbed'.

Could this not also be a spiritual reality that works from the inside out, to make the world around us a sacred space by the good we do to help it take place.

Our God certainly knows that we are a long ways off from that becoming a social reality.

But as we recognize the kind of challenges that are arising through disaffected young people groomed for death by false prophets and that force of arms are not enough to stop it, what choice do we have but to choose to believe in that Beloved Community that is possible?

Though there are many examples of how sacred spaces have been violated by lawless and loveless people, still that place within each of us to nurture an active concern for others is necessary to transform the world itself into a sacred space by what we do to help – to help the Beloved Community of God's Kingdom take place.

Amen

*Our first lesson today is 2 Samuel 7:1- 14<sup>a</sup> from the Common English Bible  
and tells about the Prophet Nathan's message from God for King David...*

- [1] When [David] the king was settled in his palace,  
and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies,  
[2] the king said to the prophet Nathan,  
“Look! I’m living in a cedar palace, but God’s chest is housed in a tent!”
- [3] Nathan said to the king,  
“Go ahead and do whatever you are thinking, because the Lord is with you.”
- [4] But that very night the Lord’s word came to Nathan:  
[5] Go to my servant David and tell him:  
This is what the Lord says:  
You are not the one to build the temple for me to live in.
- [6] In fact, I haven’t lived in a temple  
from the day I brought Israel out of Egypt until now.  
Instead, I have been traveling around in a tent and in a dwelling.
- [7] Throughout my traveling around with the Israelites,  
did I ever ask any of Israel’s tribal leaders  
I appointed to shepherd my people:  
Why haven’t you built me a cedar temple?
- [8] So then, say this to my servant David:  
This is what the Lord of heavenly forces says:  
I took you from the pasture, from following the flock,  
to be leader over my people Israel.
- [9] I’ve been with you wherever you’ve gone,  
and I’ve eliminated all your enemies before you.  
Now I will make your name great—  
like the name of the greatest people on earth.
- [10] I’m going to provide a place for my people Israel,  
and plant them so that they may live there and no longer be disturbed.  
Cruel people will no longer trouble them, as they had been earlier,  
[11] when I appointed leaders over my people Israel.  
And I will give you rest from all your enemies.  
And the Lord declares to you that the Lord  
will make a dynasty for you.
- [12] When the time comes for you to die and you lie down with your ancestors,  
I will raise up your descendant—one of your very own children—  
to succeed you, and I will establish his kingdom.
- [13] He will build a temple for my name,  
and I will establish his royal throne forever.
- [14] I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me.  
Whenever he does wrong, I will discipline him with a human rod,  
with blows from human beings.  
*Let us be guided and challenged by these words...*

Mark 6:30-34; 53-56

[30] The apostles returned to Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught.

[31] And he said to them,

“Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while.”

For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

[32] And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves.

[33] Now many saw them going, and knew them,

and they ran there on foot from all the towns, and got there ahead of them.

[34] As he went ashore he saw a great throng, and he had compassion on them,

because they were like sheep without a shepherd;

and he began to teach them many things.

[53] And when they had crossed [back] over [to the Jewish Galilean side],

they came to land at Gennes'aret, and moored to the shore.

[54] And when they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized him,

[55] and ran about the whole neighborhood

and began to bring sick people on their pallets

to any place where they heard he was.

[56] And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or country,

they laid the sick in the market places,

and besought him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment;

and as many as touched it were made well.