

Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church

"God's Promise to David"

Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:1-17; Psalm 23

Hymns: Come thou fount of every blessing (insert), Come, let us sing to the Lord our song 412, Open the eyes of my heart (insert), Hail to the Lord's Anointed 115 (1-3, 5)

October 23, 2016

Rev. Steve Filyk

Have you ever felt manipulated
by an act of kindness?

Have you ever received a gift
with strings attached?

She was happy when her neighbor shovelled her driveway.
Snow doesn't come too often to Vancouver,
and when her husband was alive, he would handle it.

But he's been gone for 20 years now,
And she's now a lot older.

So when her new neighbor knocked on her door
Offering to clear the driveway and sidewalk,
She was only too happy to accept.

But then only a few days later,
That same young man asked
if his visiting parents could park in her driveway.

This has become a real tradition since.
One time she came home,
And couldn't get her own car in the garage.
He apologised, when she complained.
But he acts like it's his overflow.

Have you ever felt manipulated by an act of kindness?
And have you ever given gifts,
Have you ever given gifts,
With strings attached?

To be fair most of our gifts
are to some degree self-seeking.

Gifts express our love and appreciation,
As well as our desire to stay close and connected.

And yet sometimes these healthy desires
Morph into something more insidious.

Instead of being tools for keeping connected,
They become instruments of control.
Methods for making others acquiesce to our plans.

Imagine this situation...

Grandma calls her daughter to share some good news.
She's sending an early Christmas gift.

Soon two burley men
Are hauling an expensive new upright piano
Into the family's living room.

The grandkids are elated,
But the parents are not so excited.

Before it is even delivered
Grandma starts asking when the kids
Will be enrolled in piano lessons.
And their schedules are already full!

Or imagine another scenario...

Grandma is excited, beaming.

This is the first time in five years
That the kids will be spending Christmas at her place!

Over the past couple months
Her daughter has been calling more frequently.

Then, a week ago, her daughter shares the glad news
That the family has booked tickets.
They will be spending an entire week her.

This puts grandma over the moon.
She starts planning the visit.

But when they arrive grandma gets the feeling
That this holiday is more than a social visit.

Her suspicions prove true
When her daughter opens up about financial problems,
and asks for a loan.
Sometime we try to manipulate others
By showering them with kindnesses.
And sometimes we receive gifts with strings attached.

Today as we follow the Narrative Lectionary
We are jumping ahead from the birth of Samuel
To the establishment of the Davidic monarchy.

Samuel has ushered in that new era that was promised,
First anointing Saul to be king,
And then when God rejects Saul,
anointing David as his replacement.

This time of kings, is a time of conflict.
Both among the people of Israel (between the two rival leaders),
And between the people of Israel
And their enemies in the land.

But when Saul dies in battle
David's consolidates his leadership.

He earns the loyalty of the warring tribes,
and defeats their enemies, the Philistines, in battle.

He takes Jerusalem from the Jebusites
establishing it as a new capital for the nation.

He erects a new palace with the help of Hiram,
King of Tyre.

He brings the ark of the covenant,
The symbol of God's presence, into Jerusalem.

And he decides he should do something for God.

This is where we enter into today's Scripture lesson.

During this time of consolidation and peace
David has a conversation with the prophet Nathan.
David shares his concern
that while the king lives in a spanking new palace,
the ark of God still resides in an old tent.

Knowing that David is thinking of a building program,
Nathan gives him God's blessing:
"Whatever is on your heart, go and do it.
God is with you."ⁱ

We can only speculate about David's intentions
In wanting to build God a temple.

We know that Scripture describes David
as a man with a 'heart for God'.ⁱⁱ
And we know that David knew,
God had put him on the throne.ⁱⁱⁱ

And so it is possible
That these temple plans
Were just a simple expression of gratitude.

And yet considering all David's work
in consolidating his kingdom
It's hard not to imagine that David is deliberately
Trying to cultivate God's favor
And benefit from God's support.

History shows us that

“temples were built to serve and worship
the high god of any nation
and in turn functioned to legitimate
the king who built them.”^{iv}

So does David’s offer come with strings attached?

Considering God’s response,
it seems that God was sensing
An attempt at manipulation.

Just consider the message that the prophet receives
Later that night:

“You’re going to build a ‘house’ for me to live in?
Why, I haven’t lived in a ‘house’
from the time I brought the children of Israel
up from Egypt till now.

All that time I’ve moved about
with nothing but a tent.

...did I ever say to any of the leaders
...‘Why haven’t you built me a house of cedar?’”^v

All to say that while David is suggesting God needs a new building,
It’s not at the top of God’s priorities.

But that’s not all.

God takes David down a notch
Even as God addresses him:
“tell my SERVANT David”.^{vi}
“tell my SERVANT David.”

And lest this ‘servant’ starts letting
His new position as King go to his head,
God reminds David who put him on the throne:

“I took you from the pasture...
and made you prince over my people Israel.
I was with you everywhere you went
and mowed your enemies down before you.”

Well that’s humbling...

But then after putting David in his place,
God the real king,
Speaks of what God will do for David,
And the nation.

“Now I’m making you famous,
to be ranked with the great names on earth.
And I’m going to set aside a place for my people Israel
and plant them there so they’ll have their own home
and not be knocked around any more.”^{vii}

And then there’s the clincher,
God’s humorous response
to David’s ‘magnanimity’:

“God himself will build you a house!
When your life is complete
and you’re buried with your ancestors,

then I’ll raise up your child,
your own flesh and blood, to succeed you,
and I’ll firmly establish his rule.”^{viii}

David offers God a house, a temple,
And God says God doesn’t need it.
Then God promises David a house,
an enduring dynasty.

PAUSE

When David decides to shore up his rule, his kingdom
with the building of the Temple,
God lets David know that God won’t be manipulated.

But God also affirms his unconditional loyalty:
 God promises David that David's kingdom will never end.

God, I think, is teaching David about grace.
 No God won't be coerced into blessing David.
 But yes God is committed to caring for him.

This is instructive for us.
 This is instructive for our relationship with God.

God won't be manipulated, God won't be bought.
 We might not always be aware
 Our attempts at manipulation,
 but God knows our hearts.

All to say that we can't earn God's favor
 Buy putting money into the offering plate.
 We can't put God into our debt
 By our service to the church.

God won't be owned by anyone.

This maybe sounds like bad news.
 Especially for those who are anxious
 About their futures.

We want God to be there for us when we need God.

And yet this bad new comes with good news.
 You don't need to manipulate God into loving you,
 Being committed to you.

ⁱ 2 Samuel 7:3 NRSV

ⁱⁱ see 1 Samuel 13:14

ⁱⁱⁱ 2 Samuel 5:12

^{iv} Patricia Dutcher-Walls "Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B; 2 Samuel 7:1-14a"
The Lectionary Commentary: the Old Testament and Acts 203

God already is.

God eventually acquiesces to having a temple to honor God
 But David, David won't be the one building it.
 And while David doesn't lift a single finger,
 God's promises will stand.

This is called grace.
 Prevenient grace.
 Grace that is "prior to
 and without reference to
 anything humans may have done."^{ix}

We see this in the neighbor
 who shovels the snow of our sidewalks
 Just to be kind to us.

We see it in the grandmother who writes a big check
 To support whatever activities
 The kids and parents can agree to.

We see in in the visits of children
 Who make an effort to keep in touch
 With their aging parents,
 Without any side agenda.

Such grace is God's heart towards us.
 We don't need to manipulate God to care for us
 Or be concerned about our futures.

God already cares. Amen.

^v 2 Samuel 7:5-7 MSG

^{vi} 2 Samuel 7:5,8

^{vii} 2 Samuel 7:9-10 MSG

^{viii} 2 Samuel 7:11-13 MSG

^{ix} "Prevenient Grace" *Wikipedia*