

2 Samuel 7:1-1, 16 4 Advent Pastor Bill Uetricht 12/20/20

Sometimes Biblical texts seem far away, disconnected from the life I am living, and *sometimes* they seem as near to me as my breath. Today is one of those sometimes. When I first read the story from Second Samuel about David, Nathan, and the temple, I felt such a resonance with that story, and even with David, the questionable and morally bankrupt, yet much loved king of Israel.

The story tells us of David who finally, after a lot of hard work dealing with enemies, has found rest in his own home. Well, as is true for many of us, his brain and probably his needy little self, cannot rest. He says to his advisor, the prophet Nathan, "You know, I've got it good here. I am living in a big old house, but poor old God, he's having to stay in a tent. Shouldn't he have a place big enough for who he is?"

"Well," Nathan responds, "You've got some plans. Make them happen."

So, Nathan goes to bed, and during the night he meets God who unsettles his affirmation of David. And why God is involved in what the systems people called triangulation, involving a third party, not talking directly to David, I don't know. But God tells Nathan to tell David that he doesn't need a big old house. Since the days he led Israel out of Egypt, he has been a God-on-the-go, moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. He doesn't need a big old house made of cedar. He's content with he's got.

God's response to this takes me back to my growing up years because my Dad was a little like God. My Mom was a lot like David. She had plans. She wanted a bigger house, a better house. And my Dad would say, "What's wrong with this one? It's working fine for me."

David had plans. And from my perspective, the plans seem somewhat righteous. What's wrong with honoring God? And by the way, there are scholars who think this particular passage was a later

addition that represented propaganda for David. After all, David wasn't always such a stellar fellow. As you probably know, he ends up arranging for the death of a man, commits adultery, and steals a woman from another man. The story in today's text shows David to be a man with a good heart, with good desires. He wants to do something good for God. But the problem was that his plans weren't God's plans.

Now here is where I find such a resonance with this story. Christmas so often means making plans. We plan for a big Christmas party that we have every year. We plan for smaller social events and meals that we will host and attend. We plan a children's program for the church. We plan for large worship gatherings. We plan to go to concerts and plays. We plan for the annual family gathering on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. And all that planning, frankly, is pretty good, reflecting generally some righteous purposes. We want to be with people, relate to people, make memories with people.

And this year, for many of us our planning is for naught. What we thought we were going to do and always do we are not doing. Covid has been one giant plan interrupter. We can't do what we planned to do, or we can't even make plans.

Now I am not suggesting that this Covid stuff is God's *plan* for us; I don't view life in that way. But I do think that many of us operate in life on the basis of *our* plans—plans that be quite good. And, yes, it isn't helpful not to have plans for your life. I've known people who plan very little, and they can be a real challenge. To them I often want to say, "How about doing a little planning, and you wouldn't be in such a mess?"

But we do ourselves a great disservice in believing that life is ours to plan out, that life fundamentally is a creation or a consequence of our plans. Life is bigger than our planning. If life is simply the sum total of our plans, we will miss out on so much.

I remember one day many years ago being very involved in a myriad of activities. I was extremely busy and had much to accomplish, including writing a sermon on the significance of taking care of the poor. In the midst of the frenzy of my activity, my fulfilling the plans that I had made for myself, someone came to the door of the church seeking food. I do not have time for such a disruption of my plans.

Frankly, I was ticked off at this person for coming and anxious about completing my plans, so I threw some food at him and ushered him out the door. Besides, I had plans to have finished my sermon about caring for the poor, and he was disrupting them. How many times have I missed out on the fullness of life because I have operated only on the basis of my plans?

This past week while writing this sermon I was confronted by these words of Richard Rohr: “The great task of religion is to keep us fully awake, alert, and conscious. Staying awake comes not from willpower but from a wholehearted surrender to the moment—as it is. If we can truly be present, we will experience what most of us mean by God. It’s largely a matter of letting go of resistance to what the moment offers or of clinging to a past moment. It is an acceptance of the full reality of what is right here and now.”

In other words, being truly alert or conscious is not to define life on the basis of *my* plans. There is something bigger than my plans.

It's interesting to note in the story about David and his plans what God declares. He says, I don't want a house from you because I have different plans for you and your life. I will make *you* a house. You are thinking about a building; I am thinking about a dynasty, a legacy. You want to confine me in a building; I want to be building a big thing that will last throughout history. The promise in the text is: “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.”

Now, let's be honest. The Davidic dynasty didn't last forever. And in some of the kings, the people didn't get such a good deal. They got some real bums. But the point remains: God's plans, that didn't end up matching David's plans, still had within them *promise*.

Sometimes we think that when life doesn't work out the way we expect it to or as we planned it, then our days are lacking in promise or that they are devoid of the possibility of joy. When our plans are replaced or put to the side, we rightfully don't see the bigger picture, the real possibilities that are embedded in the plans that we didn't create. And don't hear that, by the way, as some kind of cheap advice for people who are going through pain: "Don't grieve too much; after all, you will learn a lot from your pain." I would never say that. But this I would say: life is not limited to the plans we have made for it. And there is promise even when our plans are confounded.

This Christmas Eve and Christmas day and the days following, Bev and I will gather around our tree alone. Our sons and our grandson won't be with us. That wasn't our plan, nor would it be our plan. Nor do we expect it to be our plan next year. But it is the *isness* of this year. We're sad and long for something very different. Yet these are not days and experiences without promise, and therefore the possibility of joy. My relationship with Bev is deepening during these days. Our appreciation for food is increasing. Our creativity is being sharpened. Our longing for communion with people is growing exponentially, and while longing is so hard it is the seedbed for a legacy of relationships built and nurtured.

Today in our gospel lesson we encounter one of the great heroes of the faith: Mary, young Mary, Mary from the less-than-desirable *Galilee*. Who knows what her plans were? I suspect that those plans didn't include pregnancy. She was a virgin. She hadn't yet married Joseph. She was betrothed to him, that is, legally committed to him,

but they weren't yet husband and wife. But God brings her some new plans—plans that unsettle her sense of her place in the world. “He has looked with favor on my lowliness,” on my not really counting for much in the social structure of my day.

Mary's plans were shaped by her sense of where she was in the pecking order. That sense always keeps people's plans small. But God thinks big even for lowly people. “You shall bear a child, and his name shall be Jesus. And he will be called great, the Son of the Most High.” The lowly are exalted in the plans of God.

And Mary said, “I am the servant of the Lord. I live to do your will! Let it be to me according to your word!”

Wow! What a model of one who realizes that life is not limited to the plans *we* make; life is not defined simply by *our* choices, *our* plans, *our* strengths, *our* limitations, *our* need to control. Mary, I am sure, was petrified. Yet she trusted God. She, as Rohr says, “surrendered to the moment as it is.”

O God, give me the faith of Mary!