

Sermon for Sunday, October 26, 2025—Reformation Sunday

Selections from 1 Kings 5 and 8—the building of the Temple

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

In order to derive a message from today's Scripture that has real meaning for us in the year 2025 we need to go back in time to gain some historical perspective on the ancient Israelites and their religious practice. At this point in the history of the Israelites the main focus of their worship; the place where they believed God lived was the Ark of the Covenant. The ark was portable and moved with the people. At first it was located wherever the people were camped out. Now they knew, just as we do, that God lives everywhere in the world; but it's always helpful to have a focal point: a place where everyone gathers to worship. That's what the Ark of the Covenant provided: a place where all agreed that God could be worshipped.

By the time the Biblical narrative gets to the book of 1 Kings (our Scripture reading for today) the ancient Israelites were more established and not nearly as nomadic as they once were. David, as king, had moved the ark into Jerusalem but during his reign it wasn't necessarily housed in any formal place. David thinks that circumstance doesn't bring enough honor to God and wants to build a Temple as a formal and beautiful place for the Ark to be located and therefore as a place for God to be worshipped. He recognizes that it is only because of God that he has risen to this level of power and he wants to thank God by building a Temple. But when David "asks God for permission" to build, God says, "No." David has spent far too much time in warfare and God insists that this task needs to be accomplished by David's heir and son: Solomon. The circumstances around the building of the Temple by Solomon is the main point of today's Scripture reading.

The building of the Temple was a massive undertaking. We are told in another place that the building of the Temple took seven years. The men conscripted to carve the stones and hew the timbers numbered in the tens of thousands. The result of this project was a stunningly beautiful place for the worship of God. And there is nothing wrong with having a stunningly beautiful place to worship God—absolutely nothing.

In the same way as we gather to worship here at Vasa we sit in a beautiful worship space: freshly painted and carpeted with stained glass windows that glow in the sunlight. The fact that we have a place like this is to acknowledge our forefathers and foremothers who desired to have a beautiful place to worship God. We remember how they mortgaged their farms to come up with the loan money for construction. They risked much to erect this building. Without question our God deserves worship and praise and if it helps us humans to conduct worship worthy of God in a beautiful place: so be it.

BUT, we are humans and as I mentioned last week: we are both sinners and saints. The sinful part of us tends to hold our place of worship in such high regard that we forget something important. That something important is that God doesn't need a beautiful sanctuary. God wants us to worship him and doesn't really care if we are in a beautiful sanctuary or sitting in a house with a dirt floor and a tin roof. That being the case how should we think about sanctuaries and worship?

Musician Randy Scrugs wrote the following lyrics:

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary,
pure and holy, tried and true;
with thanksgiving, I'll be a living
sanctuary for you.

This is probably the best way for us to think about worshipping God. Our body needs to be the sanctuary for God. Our bodies need to be places that exhibit the love and mercy of God through our interactions with others.

What does this mean? It means that we are called to be ambassadors of God. We are called to carry the sanctuary of God with us wherever we go. We need to act in ways that honor God. But it also means that we need to look at the people around us as ambassadors of God. It means that even when we deeply disagree with the person across the table or in the pew on the other side of the aisle or in the house across the street we need to look at them in the same way that God does: as sanctuaries/repositories of God. And that's the challenge my friends. As you are well aware there are some pretty deep political divisions in our country. The challenge is for us to look at someone with whom we deeply disagree and recognize that they too, are sanctuaries for God just as we are. This may be really hard. We might sincerely believe that they are terribly misguided and that they are not following the Bible or the teachings of Jesus. But before we jump to judgment on

them we must pause and ask if we are the misguided ones. What if we have it wrong?

Because of our human nature we are always struggling to live up to the standards of Jesus with his challenge to "Love God and love our neighbors." We often fail to act in a way that typifies a beautiful sanctuary dedicated to God. And for that we need to ask for God's forgiveness and mercy. It's back and forth my friends: sometimes we get it right and sometimes we fail miserably.

Most every week we confess, the following words of the Apostle's Creed: [Jesus] is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead." Think about that statement for a minute. Someday we will stand before the judgment throne, and when that happens we will be confronted with all the mistakes, all the sins, all the false idols, all the hurt we have caused in our earthly life. And it's not going to be pretty for any of us. The remorse we will experience when our eyes are opened will be mind-boggling.

But then there's the grace part. For you see, we recognize that in spite of our sinful natures and all of the things that we have done that have caused pain and hurt in the world; nothing we have done has separated us from God's love. And nothing we have done is so bad that God is going to reject us. As the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:38-39 "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Nothing can separate us from God and from God's love. And that's grace my friends, God's unearned love showered down upon us. We are the beloved of God; claimed by God forever.

In conclusion: today's Scripture reading is the story of the building of a beautiful place to worship God. This story leads us to consider the beauty of the place where we worship. We can be proud of this place. There is nothing wrong with having a beautiful and awe-inspiring place to worship. But that beauty, that awe must direct our minds to God. It's not the building: it's God that we worship. On this Reformation Sunday, our challenge is to rededicate our lives to the worship of God: the one who gracefully loves us now and to the end.

Let's pray: Good and gracious God, we confess our tendency to set up false idols before you. We ask you to renew our hearts so that we worship you in all your splendor and glory. We give thanks for

your love and mercy and trust always in your loving care. In your holy name we pray, Amen.