

Proper 16 B
I Kings 8:1, 6, 10, 22-23, 27
August 25, 2024

Here, There, and Everywhere
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

[The Temple was finally finished.] Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion. Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. He said, "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!

~o~

When I first met Michael, he was attending a spirituality group that I led for residents at Lydia House, an apartment community for formerly homeless individuals living with HIV or mental illness. He'd been there for a couple of years and things were starting to turn around for him. He told me about his previous career as an investor, developer, and venture capitalist; about his wife and son; about his drug addiction and losing everything; about the

Christmas he and his wife had spent homeless, in a shed getting high before he hit rock bottom.

When Michael moved to Lydia House, the supportive and empowering staff and environment helped him on his path to sobriety and beyond. An incredibly intelligent, intuitive, and able man, he became a leader in his community, joined the congregation I was serving at the time, and was hired by a housing development agency whose mission was to create affordable housing. In Michael's case, a lot of determination and inner strength, a new place to call home and a supportive community paved the road from addiction to control, from homeless to housed, from rock bottom to community leader.

In our text from I Kings, God is apparently getting a new place to call home. Since the time of the Exodus from Egypt, over four centuries earlier, the ancient Hebrews believed that the physical presence of the divine dwelt in a special tent called the Tabernacle. Now that there was peace in Israel and the monarchy was firmly established, Solomon, who we heard about last week, oversaw the construction of a temple that was both grand in scale and lavishly finished with gold and elaborate carvings. The temple took over seven years to complete and when it was done, a great procession, dedication, and feast followed.

According to the Hebrew Bible, the cloud of God's presence rested between the carved cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. By moving the Ark, Solomon was actually relocating God from the tent Tabernacle to the new Temple and when he did, as our text says, "a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord."

That's a pretty powerful personal experience of the Holy! I wonder what would happen if a cloud filled this sanctuary—we'd

probably call the fire department! All joking aside, this story does invite us to ask ourselves where and how we experience the Holy in our own lives.

Many of us experience the divine, or at least a sense of holy awe, in the works of nature—a soaring mountain, an expanse of water, a lush green valley, rippling waves of grain in a field. Some of us listen for the Holy Word in works of music. Still others of us see the divine in the intricate equations, theorems, sequences, and hypotheses of mathematics and the sciences. And still others of us find that our moments with the Holy happen in church. In truth, human beings can experience the Holy here, there, and everywhere!

The Judeo/Christian concept of *imago dei*, “the astonishing assertion that God created human beings in God’s own image,”¹ holds that the divine can also be experienced in humanity. Christians take it a step further with the doctrine of Incarnation – of God-With-Us – the claim that the divine Christ becomes directly knowable in the human person of Jesus. Athanasius of Alexandria goes *even further* to say that, “Christ was made man that we might be made God.” That means, we don’t just experience the divine in nature or music, mathematics or the sciences; we experience God in people – in Jesus, certainly, but also in one another. And we bear God’s face to one another. Others see God through us.

If you want to experience the Holy, look around this room, look at your neighbors, look beyond these walls at the children playing in Blackhawk Park, the mother dandling a child on her knee, the elder sitting in quiet contemplation, the homeless man on the corner. We do not get any closer to the kind of experience of the Holy that I Kings describes than when we are in the presence of God-With-Us in our neighbors – in our human family. And, as we enter yet

¹ Eugene B. Borowitz, “The Torah, Written and Oral, and Human Rights.”

another contentious election season, it's a really good time to remind ourselves of what we want others to see in us.

The ancient Hebrews believed that God was physically living among them as a cloud hovering over the Ark of the Covenant and it shaped the kind of house they built for God. What would it *be* like, *look* like, if we embraced their notion of theological architecture – designing the house around our experience of God-With-Us? What would we build: a mountaintop observatory, a concert hall, a laboratory, or, informed by the incarnational theology of our Christian tradition, a place for ALL our sisters and brothers, ALL people, to gather, to engage, to pray, to sing, to experience the divine presence in one another and be transformed? What kind of house are we being called to shape in this place, on Galena Boulevard in Aurora, Illinois? As we heard in Michael's story earlier, the right kind of house really can make all the difference.

May *this* house be a place where all are welcome and where all experience the transformational love of the Holy, in word, and in deed, and in one another. Amen.