

Sermon for July 19, 2015 (Proper 11, Year B)
Offered by Nathan Ferrell at The Episcopal Church of Saint Mary

Texts: 2 Samuel 7:1-17; Psalm 89:20-37; Mark 6:30-34,53-56
Know what: Messiah made the earth his home; he fills all of it even now
So what: every living creature matters to the Lord
Now what: we need to care for the earth with compassion and intention
Title: At Home in the World

My friends: what is the difference between a house and a home?

Some of you have heard about the house to which we were given full access during the time that Erin and I were in Telluride, Colorado on our recent trip.

This house was up in Mountain Village. It was, actually, the GUEST HOUSE of the ski-in/ski-out mountain house belonging to some very rich Californians.

The Guest House had every luxury that money can buy – oxygen machines for dealing with the high altitude, hot tub, steam room, exercise room, movie theater, billiards room, a bar stocked with beer and wine, integrated entertainment systems, a wood-fired pizza oven. This Guest House of the Mountain House was likely worth about \$5 million on the local market.

It was an incredible edifice and a great place to stay for a week...but it most certainly was not a home.

We never even heard from the owners. It was the caretaker who was sent to instruct us on how to work everything.

It was a cold place. Kind of fun, but with no sense of warmth at all.

By contrast, on the way to Telluride, we spent one night at the home of the only Episcopal priest within a 75 mile radius. David Vickers serves the little parish of Saint John's in Ouray. He, his wife Barb and their two adopted children made room for us on the futon in their spare room where David keeps all of his musical instruments. David was a music major in college, and all of his various instruments were pushed over to the side to make a little bit of space for us.

They live in a simple little structure on a hillside overlooking the Uncompahgre River Valley, but it is warm and welcoming. This is a home.

King David decided to build a house for God. His growing empire was about to reach its zenith in size and strength. David had a house of prized Lebanese cedar built for himself, and now he decided to build the LORD's Temple as a showcase of his people's new imperial power. It would be a grand structure indeed.

But Adonai – the LORD – had other plans.

In this exchange with the prophet Nathan, David discovered the priority of grace. GOD is the primary actor in this universe. GOD is the initiator. As human beings, we can only respond to the movement of grace.

As the successful and powerful King, David lived in a world shaped by his own initiative. Every person around him responded to his words, to his ideas, to his desires. Reality seemed to mold itself to his vision.

So David decided to build the Temple, to construct an appropriate and honorable house for his God.

The Hebrew word for house (beit) is used 15 times in this chapter – over and over again. This was a very carefully constructed text intended to portray a very clear idea.

David says, "I will build a house for the name of Adonai, for the ark of the God of Israel."

But God responds and says, "No! I will build a house for you."

Clearly, both Jews and Christians understand this as a messianic promise. What else could it mean for the throne of David to endure as long as the sun? The tangible throne of David has been vacant now for nearly 2000 years!

The house of David, the line of David's family, has been lost. This unilateral covenant promise points to the Messiah, the one who sits on the mystical throne of David forever.

But does this Messiah need a house in which to dwell?

At sunset on this coming Saturday evening, the commemoration of Tisha B'Av begins. It is the one day in the Jewish calendar when both of Jerusalem's Temples were destroyed – both the first Temple – the Temple built by Solomon, David's son – and the second Temple – the one built after the Babylonian exile and completed by Herod, often referred to as "Herod's Temple".

Tisha B'Av – the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av – is a time of intense mourning and fasting. The House of the Name of the LORD is destroyed and gone.

But does God need a house?

What is it that we say about the Messiah each week in the Creed?

For us and for our salvation

he came down from heaven:

by the power of the Holy Spirit

he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

Instead of dwelling in a house – in an elaborate Temple built by human hands, the Messiah chose to make his home on planet earth.

Let me ask this again: what is the difference between a house and a home?

A house is a place, a building, a construction.

A home requires intention, commitment, compassion, love.

And THIS is precisely what we see in the person of Jesus of Nazareth:

intention, commitment, compassion, love.

In May, Pope Francis released his Encyclical Letter – a masterful teaching document – addressed to every person living on this planet.

The subtitle of this Letter is simple yet profound: "On Care For Our Common Home."

(The Encyclical can be found here in its entirety:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf)

On Care For Our Common Home. In this amazing treatise, Francis calls all of us to a “global ecological conversion”.

In particular, he calls all Christians to change how we live our lives, to change the way that we relate to the natural world.

What is needed right now, more than anything else, Pope Francis writes, is an “ecological conversion whereby the effects of [our] encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in [our] relationship with the world around [us]” (Laudato Si’, paragraph 217).

And why is this such a vital and urgent work for all Christians?

Because “[Christ – the Messiah] comes not from above, but from within. He comes that we might find him in this world of ours” (Laudato Si’, paragraph 236).

“Christ has taken unto himself this material world and now, risen, is intimately present to each being, surrounding [this world] with his affection and penetrating it with his light” (Laudato Si’, paragraph 221).

This is Incarnation. This is embodiment in the world.

Can you see what this means?

What does it mean to be at home in this world, to care for the earth as our common home? It means, above all else, to be Christ-like, for this was AND IS the way of Christ.

“The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely,” Pope Francis wrote.

“Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face” (Laudato Si’, paragraph 233).

“Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God” (Laudato Si’, paragraph 84). Everything is a caress of God!

David wanted to build a house for God. That house was eventually built by his son Solomon, but not before the voice of God spoke and re-directed David’s attention – and our attention – toward the One who embodied God’s presence on this planet.

Because you and I can see the light of Christ in the face of the poor, in the eyes of refugees, in the fish of the sea and even in species of insects which we have yet to identify and name – we have the duty - and the privilege! – to approach each living thing on this earth with intention, commitment, compassion, and love.

Pope Francis ended his Letter to humanity with two beautiful prayers, one of which includes these words:

“Son of God, Jesus, through you all things were made.
You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother; you became part of this earth;
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.
Today, you are alive in every creature in your risen glory.
Praise be to you!” (Laudato Si’, paragraph 246).

Praise indeed be to our Lord Jesus who chose to make his home on this planet earth,
and whose Spirit lives today in every living organism of this world.

He is calling us to make this world our home as well – not just the property we own
or the town we live in or the nation whose flag we honor.

But to make this world – ALL OF IT – our common home which we share with Christ.

What is the difference between a house and a home?

A home requires intention, commitment, compassion, love.

Will you, my friends, consider more than just your own interests and, in every single
decision that you make, look with the compassionate eyes of Christ upon the needs
of every living creature?

Will you choose to join Christ in caring for this planet as our common home?

May it always be so. Amen.