

February 23, 2020
Rev Dr Jane Florence
Title: "A Party for the King"
Text: 1 Chronicles 29:1-10



King David loved God. David was a cunning warrior, a wise politician, and a manipulative lover. King David was not perfect, but his heart was sincere, and his worship was faithful. David loved God. David carried a vision from God that a temple would be built. The temple would be the footstool of God; it would signify God's presence in their midst. It would be a glorious tribute of their thankfulness for God's provision. It would hold the people together.

David speaks to the whole assembly and reminds them of the vision before them. They are to build a temple of marble and gold and silver and bronze. Of iron and wood and precious stones sparkling, all to honor God right in the very middle of their lives and their capital city. David paints the vision in exquisite detail. Then he sets the example saying, "I have treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it."

David gives first then he extends the invitation, "Who then will offer willingly, consecrating themselves today to the Lord?" You heard what happened next. The people gave their 'freewill offerings'; 'they gave for the service of the house of God.' They piled up their gifts; imagine a mountain of sparkling jewels and gold and silver.. tons of it. Then there was much rejoicing. They rejoiced because in giving they had all come together 'with single mind' and they offered 'freely' and rejoiced greatly. Then David gave thanks to God. It was a tremendous swelling of joy and gratitude and generosity. Vision is becoming reality. Examples of service and love poured forth. Invitation to join the party was celebrated. Gifts were brought with hearts overflowing. Rejoicing resounds. If we let this text come to life, we can hear them shouting Alleluia, and they burst into a spontaneous singing the Doxology! This is a party happening- full of life and joy and love. Generosity is overflowing as the community comes together as one.

King David gives extravagantly. As a good leader does, he leads by example; he gives his own gold and silver. It's worth about \$5 billion dollars in today's value by one estimate. He asks who will join him in his words, "Who then will offer willingly, consecrating themselves today to the Lord?" The people are asked to consecrate themselves in this giving; giving is more than writing a check. Giving is a holy act of worship.

David gave enough, both out of treasury and his own personal wealth. \$5 billion dollars can build a really nice temple. A capital campaign started with \$5 billion dollars is enough. Yet, he invited the people to join in giving their material gifts and themselves. Why?

I propose the invitation for several reasons. First, people are invited to give for their own good. What we do with our stuff matters. How we relate to our money and possessions matters. It matters to our life, our spirit, our essence. We can squirrel away our resources and store up our money to take care of ourselves. When we do that, we live in principle of scarcity. We live a closed theology with the image of God as Scarcity. We doubt that there

will be more provided tomorrow, so we have to hold on to what we have. That's living in scarcity and fear. When we live that like, we deny God's provision for our daily bread. God gave us daily bread today, but God might not come through tomorrow- or next year? We'd better take over because we really don't trust God when we live in scarcity.

Also, if we choose to squirrel it all away for ourselves, it means that we think that what we have is all ours. We think our money and possessions were acquired through our own ability, by our self-made, independent, pull our selves up by our own selves. When we think it's all ours, we rationalize that we get to keep it all. That thinking denies what this text of our faith teaching says. David comments on the piles of precious jewels and gold and silver and asks,

who are we to be able to give all this? Then he answers, it all comes from God.

For all things come from you, (David is talking to God here). All this mountain of love, jewels, gold and silver - it is all yours, God. It always was yours; it came from you through our hands. It's yours not ours. We are privileged to be conduits of it for you.

The people were asked to join in the giving to make theological statements reality. Giving says: God provides. I can trust God. Giving acknowledges: All I have is a gift. Placed in my hands to share through God's grace. The invitation to give - is a gift itself - a way to express faith and gratitude. That's the first reason all the people were invited to bring whatever they could.

The second reason the people were invited to join in giving is one does not build a place of worship alone. Worshiping God isn't just solitary. Solitude is vital to our spiritual growth; quite meditation is necessary, alone with God on our inward journey of our soul is essential. We need our solo time with God just listening, but ultimately solitude is not sufficient alone.

What I learned from studying Christian mystics that most surprised me is that an inward journey to union with God necessarily leads one to outward relationship, care, and community with others. You can't be Christian only for oneself. You can't be a silo Christian. You can't build a temple for community to worship by yourself. If you try, it is only an edifice to oneself - look what I did. The community really can't have one rich guy pay all the bills at the church. Then the one rich guy owns it and others don't have investment in it. The surest way to kill a church is to let only the rich, who can give the most, pay for it. Then all others are just visiting as perpetual guests and are not claiming their place as vital part of the community.

What they were building was a temple, a house for worship God. They believed that a place for communal worship where God can be experienced in the middle of the worshipping throng is worthy of our giving. Coming together as a community, to remember as a community, this is who we are, this is what we do, this is how we are restored from exile all week long -that's communal worship.

That's what we do here. Folks gone before us sacrificed and dedicated this space sacred. they made their baptismal vows to follow Jesus: do justice, resist evil, love neighbors - to love God and to support the faith community in their giving. That's what this church decided again and again.

Ten years before Nebraska became a state pioneers gathered for worship at Q and 10th street to plant what would become this faith community. Thirty years later, they needed

a bigger place to worship. In 1885, they built a church thinking it would cost \$25,000! It ended up almost twice that! Today's equivalent of about \$1.2 million dollars. How did a bunch of Nebraska farmers and early pioneers come up with that kind of money? Only God knows. Their sacrifice and giving created a beautiful stone church for the glory of God to last for all times. Imagine their heartache, when it lasted only 14 years. A fire destroyed their temple; the sacrificial giving that had stretched them twice as much as they first thought possible was gone. The fire did not extinguish their determination to have a place for community to worship. This building, where we sit today, was completed two years later, in 1901. Two years later they spent another \$60,000 which amounts to over \$1.8 million dollars equivalent today to construct a space for worship and community. 97 years later, some of you sitting in these pews, faced a difficult decision- to renovate this historic building or move the congregation to a suburb where the growth of the city is happening. Here we are, you decided not to move, but to be downtown church in ministry to our neighbors and keeping this place where we gather to give our lives, our resources for our spiritual renewal and service to the world beyond these walls.

The church building- like the temple building- is a visible sign of communal worship, possible because of continued sacrificial giving and dedication. It is a faith statement of the importance of gathering together because communal worship gathers us around the font of our baptism. I moved the baptismal font to the center of this holy space, to place it in the midst of the people of God, spread out as you are. I placed it here to resound David's invitation to God's people. I invite you to draw near - near to the font of remembrance, nearer to one another, to move a pew closer to another soul when we worship together, to touch the water of life as you leave, pray and enter this space. I invite you to draw near to God residing in all coming together around this font and to invest your lives, to invest your money, to invest your time, to consecrate yourself as you did in your baptismal and confirmation vows.

May our worship draw us nearer to one another and nearer to the Divine. May our giving create a party, a celebration, in the Living Water of God's Abundant Love.

And the people said. Amen.