

## II SAMUEL 7:8-17

This is the word of the Lord of Hosts: I took you from the pastures and from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone and have destroyed all the enemies in your path. I will make you a great name among the great ones of the earth. I will assign a place for my people Israel; there I will plant them and they shall dwell in their own land. They shall be disturbed no more, never again shall wicked men oppress them as they did in the past, ever since the time when I appointed judges over Israel my people. And I will give you peace from all your enemies. The Lord has told you that he would build up your royal house. When your life ends and you rest with your forefathers, I will set one of your family, one of your own children, to succeed you and I will establish his kingdom. It is he shall build a house in honor of my name and I will establish his royal throne forever. I will be his father and he shall be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him as any father might and not spare the rod. My love will never be withdrawn from him as I withdrew it from Saul, whom I removed from your path. Your family shall be established and your kingdom shall stand for all time in my sight and your throne shall be established forever.

## LUKE 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, with a message for a girl betrothed to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The girl's name was Mary. The angel went in and said to her, "Greetings, most favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was deeply troubled by what he said and wondered what this greeting might mean.

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for God has been gracious to you. You shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall give him the name Jesus. He will be great. He will bear the title Son of the Most High. And the Lord will give him the throne of his ancestor David and he will be king over Israel forever. His reign will never end."

"How can this be?" said Mary. "I am still a virgin."

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most-High will overshadow you. And for that reason the holy child to be born will be called Son of God. Moreover, your kinswoman Elizabeth has herself conceived a son in her old age and she who is reputed barren is now in her sixth month—for God's promises can never fail."

"Here am I," said Mary. "I am the Lord's servant. As you have

spoken, so be it.” Then the angel left her.

## **FROM ABOVE**

**II Samuel 7:8-17**

**Luke 1:26-38**

Our scripture lessons for this morning are like connective tissue attaching muscles and tendons to the bones. As Christians, we believe in a God who is neither disinterested nor absent from human affairs, but actively involved with a plan of redemption for the human race. As such, we see history not from a short term, limited perspective, but from above, a more panoramic point of view. One of my favorite hiking trails in North Carolina begins on the banks of the French Broad River where the rapids and currents and the energy of the rushing water offers an intimate experience of the river. But when you complete your mile climb through a series of steep switchbacks to the outcropping at Lover’s Leap, you gain a vista which affords you a much more distant, but also more expansive view of the waterway. History is like that. As today’s events unfold, they become our immediate reality in which we are emotionally and physically immersed. Sometimes we forget they are part of a continuum, inseparable from the past and the future. What role God plays in this is speculative

and difficult to discern, let alone fathom, given the brutality and violence displayed by our species. If God is love, why does God not impose God's will and straighten us out? From a theological perspective, the answer to this question is that we have been granted free will and if we wish to hang ourselves with the rope we have been given, so be it. It is the choice we made.

God's purpose in creating life in the first place is also a matter of theological speculation. But one might suggest that God's vision of human history is a long one—from the top of the mountain as it were. If we are lucky, our life spans peak at around a hundred years which is laughably brief compared to the two hundred thousand years and counting since human forms began appearing on earth. But in a mere 500 years, nothing of us will be remembered. Even our graves will disappear. But God will still be here.

There were a thousand years between David's reign and the birth of Jesus. There is nevertheless a continuity and connectedness between the two. Joseph was from the House of David and God's quest for peace among God's unruly creatures continued. Another 2000 years have now elapsed since the birth of Jesus and each time we celebrate Christmas, we are confronted with lots and lots of questions. What role is God playing

now? Where is the Spirit attempting to move us as people of faith who have a responsibility to be covenantal partners in establishing peace on earth, good will toward our neighbors and justice for all? Let us reflect upon this question.

My reflections, of course, represent my own opinion and you may see things in a very different light—which is totally fine because when all are bound to one opinion, the Spirit's promptings are suffocated, the evolution of ideas comes to a screeching halt and tyranny takes root. And God's wisdom is so much vaster than our own that no one person or like-minded group of people can legitimately claim a superior knowledge of how God is working in our world. And if they claim to have that...BEWARE! So while I offer my own ideas and observations, my purpose is to stimulate your own thinking because I believe in a multidimensional and evolving universe which means that we are all involved in making history and are therefore all potential instruments in God's hands. And God can only use us if we are open to the Spirit. How can God work through us to bring peace and redemption to the world?

With that said, it is vital that everyone thinks and contributes to discussions and thereby adds their energy and insights in active participation and partnership with God in our spiritual evolution. God

selected David to build up the House of Israel and establish it for the ultimate purpose of bringing peace to the world. God chose Jesus to bring redeeming grace to all who would accept it. When you stand at the top of the mountain and observe history telescopically as a person of faith, you must ask what role we are to play now in the twenty-first century as time flows eternally onward. I believe a major obstacle we face in such discernment is the pressure upon us to take a myopic, compressed view of history which causes us to surrender to our fears, become reactionary and unable to think through issues in any sort of rational manner. When do we have thoughtful conversations anymore where we can understand—though not necessarily agree—but at least acknowledge that others have valid concerns? Middle ground is disappearing as extremism dominates the headlines and to entrenchment where all we can do is scream at each other.

Faith and politics cannot be divorced. History is driven by politics. David was a king. It was a political position. And while Jesus was not a politician, he took numerous stands that flew in the face of the Pharisees and was executed by the Romans as an insurrectionist. I am suggesting that as Christians we have a responsibility to be politically informed. Just because we may be disillusioned by our elected officials does not mean we

can disengage from the issues, ignore the news or absent ourselves from the voting booth. Millions of men and women have died over the centuries to preserve this sacred right and it is not to be dismissed.

God appointed David as king and a thousand years later, Luke connects that event to the birth of Jesus. Another 2000 years have passed and we too are connected to those events. Advent is not confined to proclaiming the birth of the Messiah. It is inseparable from the twenty-first century and beyond as we work in covenant with God's plan of redemption for our world—a world that never stops moving, never takes a vacation. We are agents of justice. We are agents of human liberation. We are friends of the oppressed. We work to end poverty and we are called to express ourselves with the same compassion and love that God showed to us in the life and ministry of his Son.

Meditating on the top of a mountain will not get the job done. If the church is to be relevant in the world, it needs to be politically active and actually demonstrate God's love for humanity. We cannot merely observe history. We need to make it!

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