

“God is Comfortable on the Move” based 2 Samuel 7:1-11 and Luke 2:26-38

Delivered on December 20, 2020 at Absecon Presbyterian Church by Drew Mangione, pastor.

I read an article on the Internet recently that said the perception we have of our fathers, is the perception we place on God and we then make the mistake of thinking that the God who created all things out of love, is just like the flawed and sometimes broken father who raised us. It is this flawed reasoning, the writer asserts, that drives a lot of people away from faith in Jesus, because they cannot believe that there is comfort, in the arms of any father, even a heavenly Father.

Now, I had an amazing father, whom I love very, very much, and who I know loved me. But speaking from the perspective of being his son, I can say being a good parent is really, really hard. My father died when I was 27 years old, and I often wish he were still here. Days before he passed away, he talked with me about being a grandfather, and how much he wanted me to be a father and give him more grandkids. Claire and I often smile when we think about our two kids, and how much Pop would have loved them both.

Yet, for all the fond memories I have of my father, and my mother too, if I’m honest, there were plenty of failures in raising me, my three brothers and two sisters. To go along with the joy and love they gave us, my parents made mistakes. Sure. Indeed, they often missed the mark, and even failed to keep promises. As a parent now, I’m already seeing where it is truly impossible to be the kind of parent I want to be for Harrison and Josephine. No matter how hard I try and no matter how much I do, I always miss the mark, make mistakes, and fail to follow through.

This is why it does seem a little bit ridiculous to make God in the image of our fathers. Yet, I think the blog writer is correct in her assertion that this is what we tend to do. When the Bible uses terms like Father and Son with God, it then gets even more confusing. And even if we can separate God in our minds from our own fathers or mothers, we apply archetypes of what we think a father is or a father should be and assume that these were the same 2,000 years ago and today. We assume they are concepts that are not bound to culture, and terms that mean the same in every language, when this could not be farther from the truth.

Why do I bring all of this up? Well, let me give you an example. Claire and I loved the television series Downton Abbey on PBS. We have watched all 52 episodes in its six seasons and the movie, all of them at least twice or more. One of the things that we have found fascinating is how they portray parenting. For the most part, the adult lords and ladies spend their time together, while the children are somewhere else in that grand estate, with an extensive staff of nannies who care for them. The children see their parents and grandparents at appointed times in appointed places only.

Now, I’m sure that this kind of thing pre-dates that Victorian era, and I’m sure it still exists among the super wealthy today, but even though most or likely all of you were not raised in

this way, nor are you likely raising your children this way. Yet, how often do we perceive God to be our Father in this way? Think about it – we imagine that God is stationary. You come to church to see God. And we think it is our job to go to God at the right time and place. We don't often see God as the parent who comes to us, who wants to be with us where we are, no matter where that is. The God and Father who pursues us and loves us for our sake, simply because we belong to God. This relationship is not a means of preserving tradition, maintaining status, creating wealth. God is not like Lord Grantham, nor is God like King David.

In today's scripture from 2 Samuel, we see that David has just moved into a new house, and his first inclination is to assume that God would want the same kind of place, a palace. For a King or any leader, a palace or office makes life easier. If people have a place to go, where you can meet with them, it is easier than always having to go out to them to meet. And so, Nathan the prophet right away at first agrees with him. He says to go with it. It works for you, it will work for God. He tells him to proceed with it. But then God corrects this and says, 'NOT SO FAST NATHAN and DAVID.'

You see, God has, up to this point, been very comfortable moving around in the tent. As we talked about last week, the tabernacle held the presence of God. The cover of the ark of the covenant was the meeting place of heaven and earth, sometimes called the Mercy Seat. And even though only designated priests who observed strict Levitical laws could enter the tent, it was still with the people, close to them, accessible in their midst and able to move with them, where the people could recognize God's presence.

So, for the moment, God rejects this idea of having a permanent temple structure or house. Rather than accepting a gift from David, God chooses to make covenant with him, promising him that God will build a house for David, meaning a dynasty of rulers, that will not merely last a long time, but which will last forever. For the people of Israel, this was another of God's promises, one that they expected to be fulfilled, even when it looked like it had been broken.

There was the covenant with Noah to never destroy the world. It was like the covenant with Abraham that his descendants would be a light to all nations. It was like the covenant with Moses that those whom God had saved, called and chosen were given the law to be a people set apart. Now, here was David with this covenant that his descendants would be in charge forever.

King David's son Solomon took over the throne from him, but Solomon messes everything up and when Solomon dies, his son causes a division. The kingdom of Israel is divided into Judah, ruled by David's descendants, and Israel, ruled by a different line of Kings, starting with Jeroboam. When Judah went into exile, that effectively ended the reign of David's descendants. Even when Judah had Kings again, they were from other families. Herod was not descended from King David.

So, in the time of Jesus, the people were looking for a new King, one in David's line, to come and throw off the Roman occupation and become their King yet again, but this time, to have the dynasty of David last forever, as God had promised. This is where today's story from Luke's gospel comes into the picture. The people are still imagining a King to rule in a palace, and for God to be in a temple, both in stationary places, but God upends normal expectations.

Instead of merely an earthly King, by the Power of the Holy Spirit, Mary conceives a child. She is overshadowed, or protected by God, because this child is not only a mere human, but the one and only God of Israel, sharing in our humanity, to live as we live, and to die as we die, except to die at the hands of the world's most powerful empire that does all it can to destroy him, only to rise again to new life, conquering sin and death, and revealing for us God's plan for a new creation, in which God will forever dwell with the people.

Jesus is not a King like other Kings, but more, because Jesus is One with the God of Israel, but also because Jesus is not like other kings stuck on their power, because Jesus is humble. He will be born in a manger, flee with his parents to Egypt from a tyrant king as refugees. They would come back to a small town in Galilee called Nazareth, where he would be raised by Mary and a handyman, then live as an itinerant preacher, and die on a cross reserved for slaves and rebels. This is not like our typical view of a king, just as God is not like our typical view of a father.

God tells David that being on the move is the way God likes to be. God comes to Mary by sharing in our humanity. He moves with Mary first in her womb, and then grows up to move about the people, teaching, healing and spreading love. By his life, death and resurrection dying and rising for us, God's Spirit rests in us, among us and within the church today, made to be temples of the Holy Spirit both individually and corporately to reveal God's presence. Yes, even we, lowly us, are given the opportunity to share in God's work to reconcile all things and restore this world to the way that God intended all along, with our Lord living with us in a world without sorrow.

We're not there yet, but friends, God is not a father like any we have or any father we have seen in this world. God does not miss the mark, make mistakes like I do as a parent all the time, and God always fulfills a promise. You see those three things are what the words used that we translate as sin actually mean – to miss the mark, to make a mistake, or fail to keep a promise/follow a law. That is not God. God is different, set apart, holy. God is our source. God is the father we should all strive to be, even though we know we will never be so perfect.

We strive to be like our heavenly Father not to earn God's love, but to reveal God's love. Indeed, God is a Father who loves us even when we miss the mark, when we make mistakes, and when we fail to keep our promises. We should not treat God like Lord Grantham, where our only encounters are at set times and places. We put God in a box and that's it. That's when our Father is available to us. We should not treat God like the father who always expects us to earn his respect. God loves you just the way you are. God wants you to grow and change, become more

like Him, but God will love you even in your mistakes. That's the kind of Father that our God is. That's the kind of love we see in the lovingkindness of the Hebrew scripture and in Jesus.

God is the type of father who moves around with us and seeks us out. God goes where we go and does not want us to be apart from Him. God is on the move and very comfortable that way. Know that always, God is moving toward you. In this Advent season, as we close out this final week and look excitedly toward Christmas on Friday morning, we remember what this season is all about: God comes to us. God is with you right now, wherever you are sitting. Maybe even tapping on your shoulder, tugging on your heart, asking you to just turn to Him. Move with Him and know that He is always with you. Amen.

Word Search Puzzle

from Pinawa.Church/puzzles (use for free distribution only)
words in a straight line left to right or top to bottom



Words in the puzzle are in ***bold italics***.

(2 Samuel 7:1-11 NRSV) Now when the king was ***settled*** in his ***house***, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the ***king*** said to the ***prophet*** Nathan, "See now, I am ***living*** in a house of ***cedar***, but the ***ark*** of ***God*** stays in a tent."

Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in ***mind***; for the LORD is with you." But that same ***night*** the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my ***servant*** David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to ***build*** me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I ***brought*** up the people of Israel from ***Egypt*** to this ***day***, but I have been ***moving*** about in a ***tent*** and a ***tabernacle***. Wherever I have ***moved*** about among all the people of Israel, did I ever ***speak*** a ***word*** with any of the ***tribal*** leaders of ***Israel***, whom I ***commanded*** to ***shepherd*** my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not ***built*** me a house of cedar?" Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant ***David***: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the ***pasture***, from following the ***sheep*** to be ***prince*** over my ***people*** Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have ***cut*** off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a ***great*** name, like the name of the great ones of the ***earth***. And I will ***appoint*** a place for my people Israel and will ***plant*** them, so that they may ***live*** in their own ***place***, and be ***disturbed*** no more; and evildoers shall ***afflict*** them no more, as formerly, from the ***time*** that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you ***rest*** from all your enemies. Moreover the ***LORD*** declares to you that the LORD will ***make*** you a house.