

Centre Street Congregational Church, UCC

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Called to Do Our Part

Rev. Susie Maxwell

Let us pray . . .

It's pretty normal to reassess our lives during or after troubling or disruptive times. This work of considering other ideas naturally gets activated and stirred up because we need to see and establish new things as part of finding our way out of those troubles or disruptions. The real work of course, is to understand that we don't do these things on our own.

A reassessment was part of King David's energy as we heard from Suzie's reading: The king was settled in his house, and he was enjoying the rest God gave him from all his enemies. It is from this place of being able to catch his breath that a new perspective inspires David to build God a permanent dwelling, so he says to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan is on board! Oh yes! He says, let's get cracking! God's gonna love it!

We had this same text this past Advent season with the focus showing how the dots were connected from King David's line to Jesus. Samuel was initially one coherent story, and it was only divided into two books because the original scroll was so long.

The story speaks to Israel's period of transition from independent tribes to an emerging monarchy with the reminder that despite the turbulent times, God is still at work.

And not only is God still at work, but as usual, God has other ideas. You see, the problem with David's house idea is, he left God out. When God learns of David's plan, God tells Nathan to remind David of their history together, basically saying:

Look David, you didn't create your success.

I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to becoming prince over my people Israel,

I've been with you wherever you went,

I 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.

I will appoint a place for my people Israel.

And of course, God goes on to do what God will do, turning things around and upside down, saying:

I will make YOU a house.

Just when David perhaps thinks things are calm and settled and he can try a new thing, God changes the plan. I'm trying to imagine the look on David's face because you see, David and God had very different ideas of what a house means. To David *bayith* (bah'-yith), which is Hebrew for house, means a physical structure, a dwelling and also an opportunity to show off.

But for God, bah'-yith *bayith* IS the dwelling
not *for* God but *of* God.

God is telling David that his house will become a living house whose interior is the human heart. This isn't a kingdom humans can plan or establish, it is a kingdom only God can and did establish. As believers, we try to live within God's realm to the best of our understanding.

And soon, we will move into our 250th Annual Meeting. And as we hear the various reports and updates, we will hear much movement in our midst because, as I stated in the beginning of this sermon, it's pretty

normal to reassess our lives during or after troubling or disruptive times and not only are we still reeling from the pandemic, but we've come up hard — once again — against the realities of this Body of Christ:

We are mostly an older congregation and have more work to do than are available helpers and I know some of you are working through exhaustion. I'm a part-time pastor and that no doubt brings its own set of maddening limits at times. The whole thing feels discouraging and overwhelming for me in moments and while I know how it is for some of you, I wonder how it is for the rest of you.

Now none of this means that God is not near, it just means that perhaps God *is* the troubling and disruptive times in which we find ourselves.

And let me lovingly remind you that our trying to do church in the same old ways and falling short has nothing to do with a lack of good intentions, genuine hearts and hard work.

There are over 150 UCC congregations in the Maine Conference and I'm pretty sure I have the best one. And in my journey with you, I've seen more heart, more spirit, more genuine engagement, more love, more hope, more of what God no doubt looks like in action . . .

But I'm also beginning to see more fatigue, more resentment, more imbalance, more frustrations . . . and I just don't think it's God's intention for things to be that difficult.

Things remind me of the words of Roman Catholic Bishop Robert Barron I recently read, "A person's plan might be bold, beautiful, magnanimous, and popular, but still not be God's plan. A person's ambition might be admirable and selfless, but still not be congruent with God's ambition . . . Our lives are not about us. God's plans for us are always greater, more expansive, and more life-giving than our plans for ourselves.

The name of this sermon is “Called to Do Our Part” and I think our part is contained in the word partnership. Our part is to let God direct us as best as we can. That includes knowing when to rest, knowing when to let go of some things and knowing when to do new things that we can’t even imagine

because God is not dwelling in a fixed location.

The gang at Pulpit Fiction ask us to consider this:

- God is constantly moving in this text (vv.6, 7, 8, 9)
- Life with God is a journey — not a settling in
- Jesus was also homeless and constantly on the move and moving others with him
- God moves with us through life — through the valleys and the mountaintops.

Knowing the shifting nature of life and ministry - perhaps this is why God is good with living in a tent and that furthermore, as people of faith ours too is a journey of movement.

Beloveds, Annual Meeting is a time for us to review and reassess *with* God as our witness *and* our guide.

My prayer is that we allow ourselves to see our way out of our own disruptions and troubles through the lens of God. Lest we forget, God is our shepherd and we have all that we need.

Amen