

Weekend of Sunday, March 14, 2021
4th Sunday in Lent /Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B
First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:8b-16, 25-29
Second Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10
Gospel Reading: Luke 1:26-33
Sermon Title: "Davidic Covenant"

Theme

Text

2 Samuel 7:8b-16, 25-29

^{8b}Thus says the LORD of hosts: "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹and 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. ¹⁰And 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, ¹¹from 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. ¹²When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. ¹⁵But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever."

^{18a}Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and said, ²⁵"And now, O Lord GOD, as for the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, confirm it forever; do as you have promised. ²⁶Thus your name will be magnified forever in the saying, 'The LORD of hosts is God over Israel'; and the house of your servant David will be established before you. ²⁷For you, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house'; therefore your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. ²⁸And now, O Lord GOD, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant; ²⁹now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you; for you, O Lord GOD, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever."

Luke 1:26-33

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Sermon

As you well know by now, most mainline Christian denominations recognize five major covenants that God made with humankind. And that a few of them show up in the readings for Lent has lead me to preach a five-week series on those five major covenants. However, this week's lection did not include the scripture covering the fourth covenant so I just imported the Old Testament Reading from Second Samuel and the Gospel Reading from Luke. Today's fourth covenant in the series is known as the *Davidic Covenant*, and it should come as no surprise to you that the covenant was made between God and David on behalf of humankind.

Also as you know, there are symbols given by God that represent each covenant.

- The Noahic Covenant is symbolized by the rainbow
- The Abrahamic Covenant is symbolized by circumcision
- The Mosaic Covenant is symbolized by the two stone tablets
- And the Davidic Covenant is symbolized by a throne. In verse 13 of our Old Testament Reading from Second Samuel, the LORD said of David,
2 Samuel 7:13"I will establish the *throne* of his kingdom forever."

But, as has been my pattern, before we get to David and his throne, allow me to continue the history lesson that I started three weeks ago because it is important to know that these five covenants are not independent unrelated actions of God, but parts of the ongoing story of God and God's creation, and more specifically, humankind.

Last week we concluded with Moses, down from the top of Mount Sinai where God gave him the covenant, addressing the Israelites about the covenant God had made with them. The Israelites responded with a rousing,

Exodus 24:7"All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient."

This is what happened next: God summoned Moses to the top of Mount Sinai again to formalize the covenant literally carving it in stone on two tablets with God's own finger. Moses communed with God on the top of Mount Sinai for a week and down below the Israelites figured Moses was vaporized. What to do?

Now remembering that the Israelites had just witnessed God's mighty power demonstrated through:

- the plagues,
- the looting of the Egyptians,
- the crossing of the Red Sea,
- providing manna from heaven and water from a rock,
- and the spectacle of Mount Sinai!

Their solution was (wait for it), to abandon God and take up a collection of all the gold in the camp and shape it into a golden calf! Then they made sacrifices to it, had a feast where they all got drunk and danced around it!

God noticed and was going to rain down thunder and lightning and wipe them out, but Moses talked God out of that, and upon seeing the orgy with his own eyes, Moses smashed the two stone tablets,

Exodus 32:20 He took the calf that they had made, burned it with fire, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made the Israelites drink it.

Holy Crap! Well, that would come the next day, but both Moses and God were mad.

The people repented, God made Moses two more stone tablets. After this God made the Israelites make him the Tabernacle, a tent-like mobile temple, and the Ark of the Covenant, that held Aaron's staff, a jar of manna, and the two stone tablets, so that they could know God's presence among them, and God revealed God's self as a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. And on the eleventh month since the Exodus, the Israelites began to move out of Sinai toward the Promised Land.

Upon arriving at Canaan, the Promised Land, Moses sent in twelve scouts to report on the quality of the land. The twelve spent forty days (of course) spying in the land and this was their report:

Numbers 13:27 "We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. ²⁸Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of

Anak there. ²⁹The Amalekites live in the land of the Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan."

When the people heard this report,

Numbers 14:1 all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. ²And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! ³Why is the LORD bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt."

This angered the LORD and the LORD was going to strike them with pestilence, but Moses pleaded with the LORD to forgive their faithlessness again, and

Numbers 14:20 Then the LORD said, "I do forgive, just as you have asked; ²¹nevertheless — as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD — ²²none of the people who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested me these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, ²³shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of those who despised me shall see it."

And that is the how and why of the forty years of wandering.

After their forty years of punishment, Moses was able to lead them to the Jordan River valley and look at the Promised Land but was not able to cross over. Joshua was the one who led the people across the river and into the Promised Land.

Once there, the LORD told the Israelites to take possession of the land and by that God meant to remove the inhabitants, generally referred to as the Canaanites, by any means necessary. Why would the LORD require that? So that the Israelites would not be tempted to make deals and treaties with the pagan Canaanites who lived there and intermarry and worship their false gods and idols.

What do you think the Israelites did? They made deals and treaties with the Canaanites and intermarried and worshiped their false gods and idols. God responded by sending foreign armies to bring punishment upon God's people. This

pattern of disobedience and punishment, followed by obedience and blessing, followed by disobedience and punishment, followed by obedience and blessing, continued for the next two hundred years. During this time God gave the Israelites the Judges to help manage the people.

The period of the Judges had a few brief periods (relatively speaking) when the Israelites thrived, but as was their pattern, that period always collapsed and ended up with the Israelites being ruled by some other kingdom. So, sick of being ruled by the kings of other ruling nations, the Israelites asked God to give them a human king too. That was, they believed, the key to their success as a nation.

Amid their suffering, they forgot that they had God on their side and no human king could compare. God said no, and gave them the Judges. But the Israelites blamed them for their plight and persisted in demanding a human king like all the other nations had. One they could actually see and listen to as he took command of their army.

God finally acquiesced to their incessant whining and told them to elect a king for themselves. And who did the Israelites pick? The tallest Israelite man, of course. And isn't that just how people can be? Saul was the first king and he was terrible in every way. So God said, you want a king, then a king you will have, but one that I select, and whom did God select and why? David the shepherd boy who was, as the LORD described "a man after his own heart."

David was not perfect, to be sure, he got distracted a couple of times. But the reason David is so successful is that he weaved the relationship with God into the very life of the Israelites. And better than all the other leaders and Judges to date, David listened to the LORD and was obedient, and all Israel was blessed under his reign.

Finally, we arrive at the Davidic Covenant. As the blessing he received for his obedience in loving God back, and by his leadership, leading the people to obedience in loving God back, God made a covenant with him and that covenant was the First Reading from Second Samuel:

² Samuel 7:13 "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him

with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. ¹⁵But I will not take my steadfast love from him ... ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever."

The Davidic Covenant continues the trajectory of both the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants. God's plans for David and Israel are clearly intertwined. Moreover, significant parallels link David to Abraham: the Davidic Covenant identifies more precisely the lineage of the "offspring" who will mediate the blessing that was promised to Abraham: *that the LORD will make of him a great nation, and that through him, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*

Now, if you are not very sharp on your Old Testament history, knowing that we are at the fourth of five covenants and Jesus has just got to be coming next, you might think that after David things got better for Israel. Oh contraire! After David died, his son Solomon ruled. Initially, Solomon was regarded as a wise ruler, but his love of women and lack of compassionate leadership skills got him into trouble.

The nation of Israel split into two nations that became known as the northern tribe of Israel and the southern tribe of Judah. Israel picked their own king who was not of the line of David – what do you think God thought of that? And they built their own place of worship after God had blessed the Temple in Jerusalem.

Furthermore, as a divided nation bickering with each other, they were ripe for invasion. Enter Assyria, who took over the northern tribe of Israel first, but eventually the southern tribe of Judah as well. More in the northern tribe of Israel than the southern tribe of Judah, the leadership was unstable. One king was assassinated by the next and so on for three-hundred years – until the Babylonians invaded, followed by the Persians, followed by the Greeks, followed by the Ptolemies, followed by the Romans, which brings us to the New Testament.

The Davidic Covenant introduces a subtle but significant shift in focus. With the great nation promised to Abraham now firmly established, attention zooms in on his royal progeny. This royal line that I have painstakingly traced from Genesis culminates in one individual, the one born to Joseph of the house of David – meaning in the royal line - about whom the angel Gabriel said,

Luke 1:32 "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob *forever*, and of his kingdom *there will be no end.*"

But where we stop today, we find that the gate to the Garden of Eden is still closed, and we are still without hope. We are going to need a savior. It is he, Jesus the Christ, whom we will hear about next week in the exciting conclusion to the series entitled the "New Covenant."

Prayer

Loving and merciful Father, your patience and mercy in dealing with your humankind is breathtaking. We know as the created beings we owe everything to you, and yet all you ask is that we love you back with our obedience. We are beginning to see that this has always been a big and ancient problem that we won't be able to get our arms around either. Without your divine help, we are lost. Thank you for Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen