

The 3 little pigs

2 Samuel 7:1-14, Ephesians 2:11-22 (2 Samuel 1-5,12-19 & Mark 6:14-29) Rev Jean Shannon

The lectionary can seem a little crazy sometimes. This week we are reading about David's bright idea to build the Ark of the covenant a real house (instead of a tent) and last week, we were celebrating David dancing in front of the ark as it is brought to Jerusalem – totally out of sequence. Trust me, the idea came to him first – followed by the action, as it is in the Bible.

Three years ago, I preached on exactly the same passage – it was called *Upon this House*. And I talked about a house divided and how God's view of a 'house' and David's view of a 'house' were quite different. David had plans for a glorious temple. A temple that would not only glorify God but show what an extraordinary king he was. There was a lot of ego in his plans and some political smarts as well.

Only the first para of today's readings talks about David's wild ideas. The rest of the reading is God trying to make it abundantly clear that he doesn't want a house. The Tent will do just fine as he has, and always will, go where his people go. God tried to explain what a House of David might look like.

David never got to build his temple – despite his grandiose plans.

What David DID do was unify Judeah. Perhaps for his own reasons but he knew, as Abraham Lincoln later said, that “a house divided cannot stand”. While they were at war with themselves, they were vulnerable on all sides from their enemies. Civil unrest is bad for the economy. David brought peace and prosperity and a never-ending expansionism that brought fresh capital into the mix.

David had his flaws but ultimately did a greater good even if sometimes for the wrong reasons. God kept watch on his people and David was the man for the times.

The fabulous Temple was eventually built by Solomon (the wise king) and it was ultimately destroyed. Did that damage God? Was the divine any less without a house for his word? No.

God's view of a house had no walls. He talked of a dynasty that would last generations. David was more of a here-and-now person. God's view is what Paul is trying to explain in Ephesians. It is uniting a people into one family – a structure much more robust than a temple.

In a funny way, we think we have the answers but God does what God does – sometimes, despite our flaws.

So, forgive me if I skip back to last week's readings for a moment¹. Last week, we had David dancing in front of the Ark as he parades into the city with bells and drums and extraordinary fan-fare.² Meanwhile, behind the curtain lurks an enemy who despises him.

The 2nd reading was about Herod having John the Baptist served on a platter. The passage makes it clear that Herod didn't want to do it but felt compelled to save face. Indeed, the passage tells us that he liked to listen to John and recognised him as a righteous man.

I couldn't help but outline the political advantage both of these leaders imagined with their association to what was 'holy'. David could be seen as the saviour of the Ark, the keeper of God's word. Remember while the tribes of Israel were at war, the one thing they had in common was the Holy Word. Who would dare attack his city if it became the home of God. He gleaned quite a bit of credit by close association.

Herod did the same. While he imprisoned John for fear of him creating an insurrection, he kept him alive. Prison in those days could be anywhere from house arrest to a dungeon. I rather think John was on the house side of restraint as Herod conversed with him regularly. Herod got 3 things out of this.

1. It demonstrated a relationship and respect for John which gave him some cred with the followers. No need for insurrection here – and insurance if there was to be violence, John would suffer first. Insurance.
2. He actually *liked* John and valued his council. He was probably one of the few people the king could have honest conversations with no fear of reprisal. A confidant. Assurance.
3. He recognised John as a righteous man. You've heard of guilt by association. What about righteousness by association? **IF** the god of the Hebrews really existed, Herod was taking no chances – he needed some coverage. A lawyer would say, indemnification.

Both David and Herod thought they were holding an ace up their sleeves – a card they could pull out if needed. They both suffered from overblown self-confidence (hubris) and that ultimately blew back on them.

David reaps a bitter harvest. The gifted statesman who conquered all could not bring peace and order to his own family. When his son raises an army against

¹ 2 Samuel 1-5, 12-19 & Mark 6:14-29

² For some reason, every time I read this passage, I imagine David looking like Sir Richard Branson

him, he has him killed and never recovers from his grief. He anoints the son of his adulterous affair, Solomon, as the next king.

Herod lost his friend and his righteousness by association. He no longer held the leader of the movement as ransom to prevent uprisings. John's reputation and death fuelled Jesus' passion for God's work and the movement grew exponentially. Christians formed a different kind of insurrection – one in the heart.

The 3 little pigs believed in themselves.

One built his house of straw and the wolf blew it down. The next built his out of sticks, and while it was a little stronger, the wolf blew it down as well. The third pig built of bricks.

It is a great metaphor in self-belief. We can hold someone hostage to our beliefs but that doesn't guarantee grace. It is a house of straw. We can raise an army but that doesn't protect us from grief or the struggles within our families. It is nothing but twigs.

Here's what Richard Rohr said:

God comes to us disguised as our life, which seems to be the last place we want God to be. It is all too ordinary, mundane, fleshy, and unspiritual. It is just "me" and just "you" and just daily life. It is both the perfect hiding place and the perfect revelation place for the Holy One.

We are not forgiven or supported **BY** association. It is not about going to church or not. It is about being **IN** association.

It is **IN** the messy being with the divine (or otherwise) of each other and living daily *with* God. We see the divine in all the blessings from Joan's scones to random conversations with strangers that break open new ideas.

David never built the temple and that's not what he is remembered for. The great building got knocked down anyway. Edifices, self-made monuments to our greatness are houses of straw.

With Herod, there was a tension between his ego, his lust, the need to show off, and the need to save face. All this competed against his wanting to keep the ace up his sleeve. It was always going to be a jumble of sticks with no structural integrity. His divided loyalties would pull it apart.

“Build your house upon the rock³” - The House that is bricks is not really bricks but the collective souls of the family that lives in Christ. When people are the bricks and mortar no evil can blow them down.

The ace up our sleeve is the comfort of knowing Jesus. It is the joy of tradition. The Ephesians passage reminds us that the Gentiles were strangers, non-citizens, excluded and without hope. Basically, the Jewish Christians owned the ‘house’. But Christ’s death changed all that. His life preached peace – his death breached divides – everyone was in the same boat. “For he himself is our peace and made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.’ Because both groups have equal access to the Father.

And so the New Testament passage ends referring to a household as a Temple – reflecting the passage we read in Samuel. A mirror image but changed. In this, the members of the household are related by Jesus’ blood. They are no longer strangers or foreigners and together will build a house in which the spirit of God lives.

And this house is built of people – like us. Amen

³ Matthew 7:24 ²⁴ “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.