

This afternoon I'm headed out for a week of chaplaincy at Camp Nawakwa. The camp was founded about 12 miles north of Gettysburg Seminary in 1929, which makes this Nawakwa's 95th summer. Several outdoor chapels and amphitheatres bear the names of the pastors, deaconesses, and lay leaders who served the camp over those many years. In fact, the last time I was there was to preach at the dedication of one of those spaces—though my colleague who was being honored, and I'd bet the other people for whom the other places were named, were not themselves the ones who requested that legacy. That's not just a healthy dose of humility but understanding that part of the beauty of camp is that it helps us see that God is everywhere the community is gathered—even in the middle of the woods. Yet human instinct yearns to build sacred spaces, obviously. So I have prayed at the Western Wall, knelt in the Church of the Nativity, wandered the ruins of Cluny, marveled at the stained glass of Sainte-Chapelle, and made our teenagers tour the National Cathedral. Our theology says God is everywhere, but in practice, we gravitate to consecrated spaces, not because God is somehow more present there but because we have trained ourselves to more easily recognize the Divine there—something King David seems to have understood.

So far in our Old Testament lectionary this summer we have read about David being chosen from the last and least likely place in his family to be anointed king; his defeat of the Philistine giant Goliath; his lament over the deaths of King Saul and Jonathan; last week we heard about him dancing into Jerusalem with the ark of the covenant, the treasure chest that contained the tablets on which God had written the commandments. Now that David has won all his battles and established his government in Jerusalem, he gets the idea to build a temple, a house for the ark of God. Theology is ever-evolving, so although we now understand that *not in our temples made with hands God the almighty is dwelling*, as we like to sing, we can see in scripture how ancient people thought of God as inhabiting specific places: the burning bush, the pillar of cloud and fire, the summit of Mount Sinai. God is powerfully present with the ark such that the Israelites carry it with them into battle, so that the Lord will fight for them. It's why the Nazis want the ark in the first Indiana Jones movie. So David wants to build a safe, permeant place for the ark—maybe because he wants the temple to be part of his legacy, like Herod the Great would later use the expansion of the Second Temple to bolster his reputation—but maybe David is, as he says, genuinely chagrined that he's living in a palace while the ark of the Lord stays in a tent.

David gets approval from the prophet Nathan, who assures him that God is on board with his plan—a good reminder that sometimes we religious experts don't know what we're talking about. Because the Lord then tells Nathan that David has *not* been chosen to build the temple. *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. Did I ever ask any of the leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people, "Why haven't you built me a house?" I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel...*" It is not that the Lord is opposed to the building of a temple; the Lord will eventually call David's son Solomon to build a temple, and the Lord will lead the people to re-build and re-consecrate the temple after their enemies destroy and defile it. But the Lord is opposed to David getting distracted by this building project, because that's not what God called him to do. David was supposed to be caring for the people of Israel like a shepherd caring for his sheep—the metaphor used throughout the Ancient Near East for the ideal relationship between a ruler and his subjects. David is literally in the pasture shepherding his father's flock when Samuel arrives to anoint him king. David kills Goliath using a sling-shot, because, as he told Saul, that was how he used to protect sheep from predators. In last week's reading we find him disbursing food the way a shepherd would feed a flock. God didn't call David to build a temple but to shepherd and care for God's people.

David gets the lecture, but shepherding is the job of all the faithful, especially the leaders who are supposed to be setting an example and who have the most influence and resources. Yet the Bible records one example after another of the nation suffering when the leadership does not care for the needs of the people or when those in power believe their performative piety will excuse their neglect or outright exploitation of the general public. Even Herod was supposed to have been a shepherd to the people, but as we read last week, he was too busy throwing parties for himself and his friends to be concerned with the welfare of the wider community. This is how Jesus in today's gospel finds the crowds like sheep without a shepherd; he has compassion on them because nobody has been caring for them. We'll read next week that Jesus doesn't just teach them but provides for their most basic needs, like a shepherd would, as the next scene in the story is the feeding of the 5,000.

David thought he needed to honor the Lord by building a temple, but God didn't need David's temple, as if a temple is what gives glory to God. The *people* needed David, and David was most fully honoring God's commands when he was caring for and serving the community—as was Jesus—as are we all. This week while I'm at camp I'll worship in a chapel and sleep in a lodge and cook at a fire circle all named for former Nawakwa leaders. But none of those spaces honor their namesakes and give glory to God as much as the love and care that those leaders gave to the people who visited the camp over the years. May each of us leave a legacy of loving kindness, giving honor to God by giving ourselves in compassionate service to others.