

- 1) I apologize in advance if, over the next few months,
Peggy and I show up here on Sunday morning decidedly dusty and considerably deaf.
Our next door neighbors broke ground this week for a 2100 sq. ft. addition to their home.
The hole outside our back door goes halfway to China—and it won't get filled in any time soon.
We'll get through this—we've had practice:
 our neighbor on the other side did the same a few year back.
Besides, it's pay back time—we've done our own version of major home renovation.
 So have at least thirteen other folks on our street.
House building is a natural tendency we humans share with other creatures
 We've had to use the basement door at our place in West Virginia recently.
 A family of phoebes has built a nest right outside our front door.
 And they do not take kindly to trespassers intruding on their dwelling space.
 Nesting instincts are ubiquitous—for good reason:
 Homes provide places of *safety & protection*, of *meeting & welcome*.
 They are points of *connection & orientation*. Houses are *identity badges & status symbols*.
WHY are we doing we do this? What WERE we thinking?
 We often ask these question in the middle of the chaos that house building always generates.
 But it was worth it! we usually say, when we settle into our new space at last.
- 2) We shape not just personal spaces but communal spaces as well—
 nests for our businesses, health, education, government, worship
Peggy and I came to Redeemer just as the sanctuary renovation was completed—
And since then, except for the rest rooms and rector's office,
 every single room has undergone major changes (to say nothing of the grounds).
And soon we will be *breaking ground again* for yet another project.
- 3) Today we find King David up to his earlobes in construction plans.
He has just built himself a fancy house of cedar, and now he plans to do the same for God.
David has come a long way with God's help: shepherd boy—combat hero—fugitive—king
 He owes God big time, and he knows it well.
How could he live with himself in a state of the art palace,
 if he leaves God out in a ratty old tent?
God deserves at least as good a house as I have! David says.
Go for it! his spiritual advisor, Nathan, urges without even bothering to check signals.
 (But, hey, what *is* there in these building plans for God *not* to like?)
Imagine the gaping jaws and dazed eyes, when Nathan returns to David the very next day
 with an unexpected word from God: *Building Permit Denied*. What's with THAT?
- 4) Building permits get rejected for lots of good reasons—
 Plans not up to code. Too much building density already. Environmental impact.
 And then there's the wheeling and dealing, under the table stuff.
 But God's permit denial is none of these, God doesn't even *want* a house:
 Thanks anyway, but I'll keep on camping out! God says.
Camping out is great for summer vacations, if you like that sort of think—
 roughing it, back to nature, peace and quiet (if you find a secluded spot).
 But no normal amenities all year around? The creator of the world a homeless person?
 What could God be thinking?

- 5) Fortunately (though not reassuringly) God doesn't leave Nathan and David guessing.
I have two reasons for denying this building permit, God declares:
 1st) *I haven't been tied down to a single spot ever since I led Israel out of Egypt.*
I'm a God on the Move, and I don't take kindly to the prospect of being told to Stay Put.
 2nd) *I don't want to live in a house that you build; I want you to live in the house that I build.*
 The first reason has a ring of plausibility—most of us get itchy feet one time or another.
 But the second reason: *My house, not yours*—that's a puzzler.
 Is God just too proud to share human living space? Well, obviously not.
 During forty years of wilderness wandering, the one dependable place for Israel
 to check in with God has been at the door of that same old beat up, desert-weathered tent.
- 6) God's reasons for denying David's building project have to do with what we talked about last week
 —with the subtle difference between a living space shaped by *God's* own architecture
 and a living space that tries to scale God down to *human* architecture.
 And it can be oh-so-hard to know *which* building plans we're *working with* at any given time.
 In David's day, kings built houses of worship in order to invoke divine sanction for their rule.
 They built temples to the divinity of their *own* identity.
 We haven't outgrown that predisposition in the all the centuries since.
 Human beings construct competing McMansions, and proudly called them houses of God,
 They issue solemn proclamations: *God lives in MY house, not in YOURS.*
 Perhaps it's not hard to see why God has some reservations about King David's good intentions!
- 7) Well aware of the many shrines in Ephesus that have been piously erected to The God of WE,
 the unknown author of the letter called "Ephesians" suggests
 that *God's* house building projects, often as not, commence with demolition projects.
 (Quote): *God has broken down—broken down—the dividing wall—that is, the hostility between us.*
 Good fences make good neighbors, we said a few weeks back,
 God is happy to give us space, to respect the integrity of persons and communities.
 BUT God makes short work of temple walls that we turn into barricades—
 not just temple walls made of bricks and mortar, but walls constructed of ideology—
 houses shaping places of *safety & protection*, yes—
 but serving primarily as *identity badges & status symbols*
 places of *orientation & connection*—insisting: *OUR way is the ONLY way.*
 houses of *meeting & "welcome"* such as—
 long established so called "private" country club swimming pools,
 long held assumptions about appropriate standards
 of so called "objective" jurisprudence,
 long standing church polices of so called "sexual purity."
 --- all those temple walls on which are written large, in one way or another:
Our kind are all welcome here—all others are welcome to leave.
- Have you sensed, perhaps—as I have—God's demolition crews at work this week
 at the country club in Philadelphia, at the hearing room in Washington DC,
 and at our own General Convention in Anaheim, California?
 It's gonna take a while for all the dust to settle.
 And, with walls like the one on the West Bank still belligerently standing,
 I doubt God is done with deconstruction yet.

8) God's house-of-peace building project is a no-nonsense operation; it clears the ground.

It knocks down the walls of competing ideological McMansions
and creates an *open* space for exploring *different* ways of *shaping* space.

What does that look like on the ground?

Mark's Jesus, along with his disciples, give us a hint.

He and they are exhausted from non-stop missions of teaching, healing, and wall-demolishing.

They are all devastated by Herod's ghastly slaughter of their colleague, John the Baptist.

They leave on retreat—trying to catch their breath, and snatch a bite to eat.

But wave upon wave of needy people invades their space—

No! Not here! Not now! Leave us alone! We need peace and quiet!

But Jesus sees peace differently, and he has a *different* take on *what* it takes
to build a house of peace. Mark says (Quote):

*He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd
and he began to teach them many things—he began to teach them many things.*

You see what's happening here, don't you? This is a day long workshop.

An architectural instruction workshop on what it means to build a house of peace.

And it's not just a lecture Jesus offers here, it's a laboratory—a hands-on exercise,

as desperately hurting people reach out and touch; and, in return, receive a healing touch.

In the coming together of those hands, a very different kind of temple is constructed.

Everyone is invited into the project of building God's house,

rather than trying to crowbar God into their own houses—

houses at once so big, and, at the same time, so very little.

9) What does peace-house building look like at the Church of the Redeemer?

I've seen two such construction projects up and running twice this week.

One is a literal construction—the culmination of carefully laid plans to shape a *quiet* space—

a space for grief & gratitude, honor & forgiveness, reflection & contemplation

in a long awaited columbarium space, soon to take shape just outside that window.

The other is a more figurative construction—

the culmination of carefully laid plans to shape a very *noisy* space—

seventeen kids singing, and dancing and drumming their hearts out at our annual music camp,

bringing all their senses into the service of artistic creativity.

Both of these house building projects have been awesome to watch in their unfolding.

10) But wait a minute—not so fast!

How do we know that these impressive constructions are investments in *God's* house of peace,

rather than in *David's* well meaning but misguided temple plans?

Well, truth be told, we cannot know for sure.

There is no temple building anywhere immune from the subtle influence of ego architecture.

But there are some clues in what I've seen this week:

This is an open, inviting columbarium—no gates, no keys, no security codes,

No guards or ID checks—*Yes, you're OK, because you're one of our kind.*

No—rather, a columbarium that shapes an open space—open to God and to the world.

A columbarium that issues an open invitation,

regardless of the ID badge folks carry—to come and touch the peace of God.

And, as it has been from its inception—this music camp has been an open music camp.

Our kids have welcomed kids from the inner city for whom noise is seldom music.

Together they made Friday's stunning concert a paean to peace as God intends it.

The whole lot of them even got their parents to get up and dance with them.

Talking about bringing down walls!

11) Here, at least, is what we have been aiming for, in these peace house building projects:
Here is what, by God's help, we will do our very best to keep on striving for:

The author of the letter to the Ephesians (Quote):

*You are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God
built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
with Jesus Christ himself as the cornerstone.*

*In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a HOLY temple in the Lord.
in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place—for God.*

Grant, O God, this may—for us—be so.