

Second Sunday after Pentecost – May 29, 2016
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

1 Kings 8:41-43 (NIV)

"As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name—for they will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm--when they come and pray toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name.

Brothers & Sisters in Christ:

The long anticipated day had arrived – the plans had been drawn up long ago, the people had brought the best of their treasures, the laborers had worked long and hard (over seven years) and now King Solomon was leading the people in prayer at the dedication of the temple in the city of Jerusalem. This place of worship as pictured by an artist symbolized the dwelling place of God. The Holy of Holies was a place of sacrifice which could only be entered by the priest once a year. In the other sections of the temple courts there were other altars for more frequent sacrifices. In the spacious courts the people would assemble singing their psalms and hearing the words of the priests, offering their prayers together with their sacrifices and having the opportunity to learn from the temple teachers.

The focal point of this temple was the inner secret chamber known as the holy of holies where the priest would enter but once a year for sacrifice – a sacrifice which reminded the people that sin could only be atoned for with the blood of an innocent sacrifice.

Now let's fast forward thousands of years – to the present. Here is another house of God. At first glance the two places don't appear to have much in common but this too is – a place where God is present with his people as he promised; a place where God's people come to be reminded of the sacrifice which has set them at one with God; a place where we come to praise our God, to bring offerings of thanksgiving, to pray and to grow in our understanding of God's will.

Like the people of Solomon's day: We Have Come to God's House.

WHY?

Solomon's prayer suggests two answers

1. His mighty deeds have drawn us here
2. We have come with prayers and praises

As Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, he was well aware of the fact that there was no god like the God of Israel anywhere. The gods of the other nations were gods of their own making or creation. The Lord God of Israel was the creator God – the one who had made them and all people and who had chosen them as his own people – a people who were to reveal him to the nations. The Lord God of Israel was living and real – he was involved with the lives of his people. He showed his love to them in many ways – keeping all of his promises to them. The dedication of a temple to the true God in the city of Jerusalem – a place given by God to his people was evidence of that.

Such a God and the works of this God would sooner or later, get the attention of people in other nations and these people too would come to this temple with their prayers to the Lord. So, Solomon prayed about these people:

It's interesting to note that Solomon wasn't speaking of a near neighbor like Israel's distant relatives in the Countries of Moab or Edom – rather he was speaking of people from **distant lands**. These people would come because of the Lord's name and because of his mighty deeds as Solomon indicated in his prayer.

"As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name—for they will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm."

We can learn from Solomon and the foreigners for whom he prays. Jesus has given us the commission to preach the gospel to all nations even to the ends of the earth. He has taught us to pray "Hallowed be thy name, your kingdom come" asking that he would enable us to live lives which would honor him and asking that he would spread his salvation with all people. He has commanded us also to pray for those who will go and work in his harvest fields to share the gospel of salvation with others. From Solomon and the Lord Jesus we learn to be concerned about and to pray for those who are far off and in distant lands.

Amazingly, throughout history; there have been those who have been willing to travel long distances and at great personal cost because they were willing to and eager to hear the Gospel. We can think perhaps of the Queen of Sheba who visited Solomon or the Wisemen from the east who came searching for the baby Jesus or the man from Ethiopia who came to Jerusalem and learned of Jesus from Philip. Many share that same zeal today as they seek to learn the truth and receive the blessings of hearing the word taught in its truth and purity and receiving the sacraments. I served a family in my first congregation after my graduation from the seminary that traveled over 100 miles each week for Sunday worship services because that was the closest WELS congregation. There were other churches much closer to home; but none that taught the Word of God without compromising or denying its truths. Ultimately, they were instrumental in beginning a WELS congregation closer to their home – now they only have to drive about 30 miles (45 minutes) to attend church. How blessed we are to have not just one such congregation but several such congregations in a 30 mile radius of our homes – in fact most of us don't have more than a few minutes drive to church. May we rejoice with those who say to us let us go to the house of the Lord and be zealous in our worship of the Lord who has included us in his family and called us to faith through the proclamation of his wonderful deeds.

The foreigners would come because of a message. First God's great name would draw them – God's name is his reputation. Now no doubt most of the nations around Israel thought their gods were great. Non-Christian people today think that their God is great. What is the image that comes for mind for many of these people when they think of their God – the image reminds me of the oriental emperors – some of the great rulers of China. Those emperors lived in the Forbidden City – a luxurious place built with slave labor and at great cost to the people. They issued laws and decrees, which served for his own benefit. They had thousands of people serving them and attending to their every whim and fancy. For the most part, they cared little for their subjects.

The true God of course has wealth beyond any emperor – the whole earth and fullness of it belongs to him. However, that's not why we speak of his great name. We speak of him as being great because he brings salvation to his people. He interacts with his people and actually became one of them to serve them. Our God is great because he uses his power to rescue the people whom he loves.

You and I of course see this greatness of God best of all when we consider how Jesus became one of us and died to save us. The Old Testament believers knew this promise of God and saw how he mercifully delivered them from their earthly foes.

Foreigners would hear of his mighty acts. In addition to hearing about the name of the Lord they would hear of his mighty hand – strong hands were symbolic of a good provider and suggested one who would be mighty in battle. Remember, these were times when people worked with their hands and fought with their hands.

The strength of God to provide and protect was not merely a possibility it was a reality. Israel's God was a God who put his power to work for his people in real history, in their real lives. His mighty acts of deliverance were not ancient legends. They were current events. That is why the foreigners would hear of the Lord's outstretched arms. Hands busy at work or busy fighting are not held close to the body. They are at the end of arms that are reaching, pushing pulling, or slashing. They are at the end of arms that are active, just as God's power was extended to help his people and was active on their behalf – that is a distinguishing feature of the Lord. He's a God who actually, lovingly involved himself in the affairs of his people and this would draw people to worship him and learn of him at his temple.

Indeed that is why we are here – we are here because we have heard of the Lord who loved us and sent his own Son to save us. We are here at God's house because his mighty deeds have drawn us here!

Like the foreigners mentioned in Solomon's prayer we have come with prayers and praises: **when they come and pray toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name.**

The message that the Lord saves his people inspires faith which demonstrates itself in worship. That is what has drawn us here and that is what Solomon knew would draw people from distant land to come and pray toward the temple or house of the Lord.

The phrase, *pray toward this temple*, actually reminds us of a difference between our church buildings and the temple. We gather in our churches. The people of Solomon's time gathered outside the temple, outside the holy of holies and prayed toward it – the temple was regarded as the dwelling place of God.

As Solomon prays on behalf of the foreigners who would come to pray he asks that the Lord would hear them from heaven. And that is our hope as well – while we speak of this as God's house we know that he is not confined to temples built with hands. He is present everywhere – we speak of heaven as his home. And as we direct our prayers heavenward in this house of prayer we do so with the confidence that he will hear and answer those prayers. The psalmist reminds us: (Psalm 34:17) **The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.** And the Lord Jesus invites our prayers and promises: (Matthew 7:7) **"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.**

Solomon understood that when the Lord would answer the prayers of those who came to the temple from afar that this would confirm for these people what they had heard about the Lord and they would be moved to tell others about the God of Israel and the good things he had done. In this way, his reputation would be spread and more people would stand in awe of him and reverence him in faith. That in turn would lead more and more people to come to the house of the Lord where they would grow in their relationship with him.

Once again, there are lessons we can learn from Solomon and his prayer as well as from the prayers of those who would come to that temple. Like Solomon, we have not built this worship facility only for ourselves

and our benefit. The ministries of this congregation aren't just for our own benefit. We exist as a congregation not just to gather around the word so our faith may be strengthened, but so that we can spread that word to others. Solomon prayed that others would come. May we also pray that others would come and that the Lord would lead them to believe on him. When the foreigners came to pray – they came with confidence. We also can pray with confidence. And, the Lord's answers to our prayers inspire our praises.

There may be lots of differences between God's House here and God's House in ancient Jerusalem – but God the Lord is the same. May we continue to come here in response to his great works and may we come with prayers for ourselves and others that will bring glory and praise to his name. Amen.