

We have been reading through the books of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel over the past few weeks and learning about the early kings of Israel. We have learned that the Israelites really wanted a king like the other countries around them and this led to the selection of Saul as their first king. Saul turned out to not be a very good king and he was eventually replaced by David. We are now reading some of the stories about David.

A couple of weeks ago we read about David and the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant was that big box that contained the 10 Commandments that the Israelites would carry around with them as a sign of God's presence. The Ark was symbolic of a time when the Israelites were nomadic people and the Ark was the way to show them that God was with them in their journey.

But like all of us, the Israelites were looking to get settled. And what do you do to become settled but you build a building. And building a building is what today's passage is all about.

This passage will begin with the author telling us that King David is settled in his house and he is ready to build a house for God. Actually, in this period of time David and the Israelites are far from settled. This is a period of time when the Israelites are quite unsettled with wars and threats of wars.

### **Read 2 Samuel 7:1-3**

As we continue reading this Scripture we will be introduced to the character of Nathan. Nathan is a prophet who becomes the moral conscience of David which we will see next week in the story of David and Bathsheba. David says to Nathan in this passage that we will be reading that David wants to build a Temple for God.

David says that his house is made from Cedar which is a sign of wealth but that the Ark of the Covenant rests in a tent. Nathan blesses David and says that God is with him in this attempt to build a Temple. But then let's read about what happens next.

**Read 2 Samuel 7:4-14a.**

So Nathan sleeps on it and returns to David and informs him that his initial advice from God was wrong. Nathan now says that God does not want David to build a house for God. Nathan says that God is more interested in building a dynasty rather than a building right now. The physical building will come later. The physical building will come from his ancestors which we know will be King Solomon.

But right now, Nathan says to David, is for the focus to be on letting God make things happen rather than David trying to make things happen. Nathan's advice to David is to let God be in charge. Nathan tells David that it is not his responsibility to make it happen as much as it is about trusting God to make it happen.

Today you are invited to hear a presentation after worship here in the sanctuary on the plans for the 23 acres of church grounds which were approved by the Session last Sunday. I am going to spend some time now talking about how we got to this point. And I think it begins for us in the year 1853.

In 1853, Bethel Presbytery received a petition from folks in this area to start a new church. In 1853 there was no Lake Wylie. There was the Catawba River and there was Big Allison Creek and Little Allison Creek and lots of farmland. The folks in this area were having a hard time getting to the closest two Presbyterian Churches. Those two churches were Bethel to the north and Ebenezer to the South.

But the people in this area felt called by God to minister to the people in this community. It was time to build a church that was focused on this community. Bethel Presbytery concurred and so in 1854 a church was begun in this area. To my understanding it was the only church in this area.

This church has existed on this property to minister to the people in this community. And it has survived the building of a lake, a tornado, and lots of human created disasters to minister to the people in this area and give witness to the good news of Jesus Christ to people in this community.

Over the past couple of years the Session, our governing body, has spent a lot of time talking about what it means to continue to minister to this community. And with technological advances “community” today is a much wider area. The area up to Bethel Church and down to Ebenezer Church and over to York is our community now. With the advances in transportation and the internet the entire world is our community today.

At Session over the past couple of years we have talked about how the church needs to get outside of our walls to be effective today. We have talked about how we need to be engaged with the community around us and not expect the community to come inside this building. Church buildings are very intimidating places to many people in our culture today.

But as we talked at Session about all of these changes in what effective ministry looks like today, I always had this sense that this property was to be a destination place. And it has become a destination place with Bluegrass concerts and a weekday preschool. But being a destination place was different than what we were learning as we looked at the early church in the book of Acts and as we studied current trends in effective ministry.

There was also something else that kept tugging at me. I’ve had this tugging sensation that this church’s ministry would not see much change for a long period but then we would see something dramatic.

So a couple of months ago I was invited by Lorre Coone to visit a place in Stanley, NC called "Common Ground." We planned to go on a Wednesday but then my Dad died so we postponed our visit to the following Wednesday. Lorre and her husband David and I went on that following Wednesday.

I didn't know where we were going when we went to this place called "Common Ground." But this is what we found. We drive up and we find this property with a ball field and a walking track around it. We found a small building which was used as a place of meditation.

We started walking over to the rest of the property and we found this small group of people breaking up from some type of gathering but we did not know what. It turns out that the gathering was a small prayer group and this one man glued his eyes on us. There were others on the property but for some reason he sought us out.

He introduces himself to us and we find out he is the pastor of the downtown United Methodist Church in Stanley. He informs us that about 10 years ago they bought this 93 acres with plans for the church to move to this property. They built a Family Life Center on the property but the church never moved from their downtown site. So they had this property and did not know what to do with it.

Eventually they caught a vision of a place where the community would come together and make connections. And so on the ballfield the Presbyterians conduct a soccer league. In the woods someone caught a vision of trails. And then someone else caught a vision of building prayer stations.

As we walked the property David, Lorre, and I began to see the Allison Creek property in our minds. We did not talk about this amongst ourselves. But when we got in the car on the way home we began to talk and we began to think about the Allison Creek property.

Today after worship you will see the vision which has been endorsed by the Session for this property. You will hear about a walking track around the ball field that will be built in memory of Kathy Kitts. You will hear about trees being planted around this walking track to provide shade. You will hear about clearing out debris from the woods around the field which I did not know was church property.

You will hear about the soccer field and a new parking lot over there next to the field. You will hear about a welcome center out here with benches and a cross made from the glass from the original sanctuary windows.

You will hear about walking trails in these woods back here and you will hear about a Labyrinth and other prayer stations. A labyrinth and other prayer stations are ways for people to encounter God in a way that is authentic and real. Not created. You will hear that the different prayer stations will need to be created by you and others who have creative ways of expression. We have heard we need water and fountains so we will need folks with the ability to create these.

You will hear that we are working off of the theme of remember, repent, and renew. This nature prayer journey back here can be a way to help people remember that they are a child of God, repent of their brokenness, and seek renewal from God. No one but God knows what it will eventually look like.

Getting back to our story from Samuel, the prophet Nathan told David that he could not build the proper house for God but that God would need to build it. This invitation can be our invitation today.

162 years ago some people caught a vision to build a church in this area to share the good news of God's love. Has a new vision been given to us? Well, I invite us to venture down this road and see what happens. Hear the plans today and ask questions. See what happens. If this is from God then resources will come from odd places and people will appear that can add their skills and gifts.

If this is from God then lives will be changed and people will encounter God in an authentic way. I'm very excited by this project. But I realize that my history is that I can get on board with something and be blinded to reality. But I invite us to just travel along this road and let's see if this "natural house" that we are being invited to build is a house that is being built by God.

If this vision for this 23 acres is not from God, there is really not much that will be lost. But if this is from God then watch out. If this is God building something new in our midst then I think we are beginning an exciting ride.

If God is building this then the excitement will be incredible. If God is building this then we will make an impact in this community which will be so much bigger than any of us can imagine. And I invite you to be a part of this from the beginning.

162 years ago some people caught a vision of a ministry that continues to make an incredible impact in this community.

Maybe, just maybe, we are seeing the next chapter in God's vision for this community.

Hop on. I believe we are in for an exciting and life changing ride. AMEN.

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