

## God On The Move

I'm a big fan of King David.

Like many in our congregation, I bear his namesake.

But what I like best about King David is his swagger.

I love his swagger.

After 20+ years as a trial lawyer, I know something about swagger, and King David is loaded with it!

Today's reading is all about David's swagger.

You can see old King David in today's scene.

His new McMansion is complete, big swimming pool in the back yard, high ceilings, gourmet kitchen!

He's laying back on the Barca-Lounger, cognac in one hand, a big fat Cuban cigar in the other hand, every enemy has been vanquished, every battle won, every foe put to death.

And the Giants have just beaten the Cowboys!

Life is good.

As he exhales the smoke from that truly great cigar, King David gets a gleam in his eye and asks: "What can I do for you God?"

"What can I do for you?"

"I know!"

"I'll make you your very own McMansion Lord, complete with wet bar and flat screen TVs!"

"You'll LOVE it!"

His personal priest, the prophet Nathan, is all in.

"Absolutely," says Nathan, "God's gonna go ape over that!"

Fortunately, Nathan isn't a total sell out; and in his dream that night, he gets the real word from God, which goes something like this:

"Go tell Mr. Ego that he better remember where he came from; it wasn't water he used to walk on, it was sheep dung. And remind him how he got to where he is today; remind him of what and who I am ... that I'm not a God who needs a showy palace, I don't sit on recliners, and, as much as this may disappoint Tim Tebow, I hate football!"

"And while you're at it Nathan, remind Mr. Big Shot that I am free, I prefer tents to castles, and quite frankly, when he starts thinking he can do something for me, remind him that I am the source of all that is."

We live in times when it's particularly important to remember who God is.

For so many today, the god that is worshipped has nothing to do with the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Jesus.

For so many today, the god who is worshipped is simply a deified version of our existing culture; we seek out and bow down before the god who blesses our wars, who blesses our economic system, who blesses our prides and prejudices.

But the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of Jesus, will have none of that.

The giant of 20<sup>th</sup> century theologians, Karl Barth, realized that:

"To begin again with God means seeing that we cannot go on as we are."

The Living God is free, and that freedom is expressed in ways that always surprise, always upending the status quo.

We hear the story of David today, in all of his luxurious self-satisfaction, because we need to remember that the Jewish people expected their Messiah to be just like David: a warrior king who ate up his enemies, and who, by hook or by crook, got himself to the throne of power.

In the midst of our political season, it seems not much has changed.

God is invoked to justify cutting assistance to our widows and orphans; Jesus is called upon to justify the worst forms of bigotry and discrimination; every effort is made to create a God who looks far too much like us, rather than challenging us to bend, that in our bending, we might begin to look more like God.

But this free ranging God, who refuses to be boxed into a McMansion or a dogma or a political ideology, is having none of it.

Instead, God, shining through his messenger Gabriel, visits a young girl, barely a teenager, and tells her something fantastic is going to happen, if only she will agree.

While over the many years since this visitation and today much has been said about Mary's sinlessness, her being so special, so

much better than you or I, in fact, the lessons from scripture don't support that kind of piety, that kind of sentimentality.

She is simply a girl.

As good and as bad as any other girl.

God, for God's own reason, has chosen her: a nobody really, living in nowheresville, in a no-account country, to be the channel through which God becomes a human being.

The beauty of this God who is free is that God also makes us free.

Mary can say no.

She can respectfully or disrespectfully decline.

What will she say, this youngster who probably can neither read nor write?

"According to ancient Christian writers, God waits for Mary's yes; creation waits; Adam and Eve wait, the dead in the underworld wait; the angels wait; and so do we. With Mary's yes, hope comes alive and history is forever changed." (*Preaching the New Lectionary Year B*).

In her "yes" to the free ranging God, this God who turns our expectations upside down and inside out, the young girl, seized by the miracle that is the living God, rejoices in a song that is at once innocent and militant:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; **for** he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel, for he has remembered his promise of mercy.”

At times, God pitches his tent on hard rock, the rock on which Jacob lays his head to sleep, dreaming of a staircase to heaven, marveling at angels who move between worlds.

At other times, God’s tent is pitched in a smelly stable, a barnyard full of animals, and dung and hay.

Perhaps today, God’s tent is pitched in our quasi-carport, or at the back of Shim Hall, where needy people from distant lands can find shade and a cool breeze.

Today, God’s tent is pitched in our nursing homes and elder care facilities and hospitals.

God’s tent is pitched wherever human beings are in need.

And so if there is a message to all of us Davids today, and to those who swagger to the beat of the same drum as David, perhaps it is this:

Because God is content to live in tents, God is also content to sleep where we sleep, to roam where we roam, to be buffeted by the same winds that buffet us.

B1 Feasting on the Word, 79.

God is that, but not only that.

God is also always ready to tear off the roofs of the shelters we erect.

God is determined to make us his own, and he does so first by stripping us of our egos, our prides, our self-satisfactions, since it is only empty hands that can be filled.

Meister Eckhart says it like this:

“God asks only one thing of you: that you dethrone the creaturely self and let God be God in you.”

The living God is on the loose, showing up everywhere, inviting us to be on the loose, as well!

And so this fourth Sunday of Advent, the day is fast approaching when we shall name the child Emmanuel: for God is every day pitching his tent among us.

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