

“A House of Cardia”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
August 25, 2024 - Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

[1 Kings 8:1, 6, 10-11, 22-30, 41-43; John 6:56-69](#)

Please pray with me... “O God, take our minds and think through them, take our lips and speak through them, and take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen”
(William Sloan Coffin).

I hope that you’ve been having a good weekend thus far and that you’re enjoying the fantastic weather. Christine and I certainly have been enjoying some good outdoor time this weekend, and we’ve enjoyed practicing some of our weekend traditions that we follow regardless of the weather. One of these is to watch an episode each Saturday night of the TV show called *House Hunters*, a reality-TV program that shows home-buying individuals or families as they look at three different properties in a certain geographic area before settling on one to purchase. The program always starts by introducing you to the buyers and what they’re looking for in a home, and when couples are buying together, the show tries to offer some spicy reality-TV drama by highlighting all of the ways they disagree on what they want, such as one person wanting a fixer-upper mid-century modern ranch with lots of character while the other really wants an updated, move-in ready colonial-style home that’s mere minutes away from their workplace, a parent/babysitter, and a train station. To add to the drama, a real estate agent is always involved -- oftentimes way too involved -- in guiding the home buyers through their search and pointing out all of the fine features of each property. Of course, none of the buyers are perfectly happy with the options presented to them by their agent, and they have to compromise by identifying which imperfect property would best suit their needs and desires. We, of course, also chime in from home, letting them know which homes they should avoid and which they should buy. Our opinions, alas, are often ignored when the home-buyer picks the wrong house (though many do pick the right ones!). We still wish them luck as they embark upon their new home-owning adventure.

Our first scripture lesson from 1 Kings reminds me a bit of our watching of *House Hunters* in that we find Solomon, son of David and king of a united empire of Israel, trying to convince God to dwell within a house of Solomon’s choosing that

he had just custom-built for God, after all, it was ideally located in the center of Jerusalem, high on a hill called Zion, had a mostly-open floor plan with a spacious central primary suite called the Holy of Holies, where God could comfortably dwell with or above the Ark of the Covenant, which housed the tablets of stone on which the ten commandments were written. Solomon crafted what he envisioned as the ideal house for God hoping that God would dwell there and return the favor by continuing to craft a household for Solomon, that his family would continue to reign in Jerusalem for generations. And Solomon hoped that by situating this house of God next to his own house, he and his descendants would remain close to God and receive God's favor due to their proximity to the prayers and sacrifices that would be offered in the temple.

At the same time, Solomon the wise asks if God would indeed dwell on earth and if God really could be contained by a house made with human hands, controlled by prayers uttered by human lips, or manipulated by human-offered sacrifices. For Solomon recognized that while his snazzy new temple ticked all of the boxes of his human wish list, people never really could contain or control God, the maker of the heavens and earth. And maybe God wanted to live in another house anyway.

This leads us to our second scripture lesson from John, in which the gospel writer, through the words of Simon Peter, tells us where the Holy One of Israel chose to take up residence. Summing up this entire gospel, Peter exclaims that God dwells in Jesus, that Jesus himself is the holy house of God.

And another of the main messages of John's gospel that we also find in today's reading is that Jesus, the Bread of Heaven, has come to people to dwell among them so as to feed them with his heavenly body, that -- as you are what you eat -- by taking in Jesus' teachings and the life that comes from them *our own* bodies would become dwelling places of God's presence.

Solomon chose a perfectly situated house of wood and stone for God, but God desires instead to dwell within imperfect human hearts. Now, if I were watching this play out in an episode of *House Hunters*, I would shout at the TV for God to choose the new-build over the fixer-upper, but's God's perfect wisdom is greater than limited human wisdom, and God's perfect, serving love for all creation is greater than our greedy and selfish ways. So God chooses to dwell with us, all

fixer-uppers, and dwell in us just as we are rather than in any structure designed to separate God from us and our imperfection and unholiness.

This is a truth we celebrate when we gather to receive the sacrament of communion, which reminds us that God dwelled among us in the Bread of Heaven, and that this Bread is given to each of us to unite us with God. We are reminded when receiving the sacrament that we are in communion with the divine and that we have communion with one another as the body of Christ, as the temple of God on earth.

But do we recognize that we are God's house? Do we see ourselves and treat ourselves as God's desired dwelling place? Do we see others as temples of God's presence? If we did, wouldn't we act more respectfully and lovingly towards ourselves and others?

If only we could stop thinking that God desires a house of wood or stone but that God desires to live within each of us as we are, we would stop harming one another. If only people could stand at the one remaining foundation wall of the temple in Jerusalem and pray not for the destruction of the mosque that now sits atop the hill above it and for the rebuilding of a temple of stone in its place, but for the peace and well-being of those children of God who worship there now, more of God's blessings of goodness and peace would be with us all. If only the followers of Christ would take seriously our calling to embody Christ and follow Christ's ways of selfless love rather than seeking to gain from others, we would be more of a blessing to the world and would inspire others to live with more life-giving love.

Dear friends, this is our story and this is our song. Let us offer it in love and so praise our Savior all the day long. Amen.