

SERMON: 2018/07/22 (9th Sunday aft. Pentecost, Yr. B - Track 1) - 2 Samuel 7:1-14a; Psalm 89:20-37; Ephesians 2:11-22 & Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

[Invite children to the front. Have a full jug of water with "God" written on it, and a shot-glass saying, "Temple."]

'When [David] was settled in his house [-the palace], and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies...!', he decided to build a temple [2 Sam. 7:1].

"After all," he thought, "I've made myself a big, fancy castle of cedar wood..." - that's an expensive, rare kind of wood with a fragrant perfume - "...to live in and I'm only a(n earthly) king, so for God - creator of the *whooole(!)* universe - I should make something *really* amazing for Him to live in.

(You see, at that time, God was still living in the "Tabernacle" - a *tent(!)* [v.6], that the Israelites had made from goat hair in the desert on their way to "the Promised Land." [Ex. 26:7])

But before he could start the construction, his friend, the prophet "Nathan," had a dream; and in this dream God said, "Time out! I've never asked for such a thing. There have been many smart and holy people before you came along, and they never tried to do this. So, why now? Why you? It's nice that you're thinking of Me, but let's be clear: I'm too magnificent to be squashed into one little place of worship.

I'm the Lord of everywhere!"

Consider this:

[Bring out the jug and fill the shot-glass to its brim. Let the kids see the text written on/affixed to their sides.]

Oh dear, He's not going to fit is He?

God, therefore, said, *essentially*, "I know that you're worried about your *legacy...*" - that's the things you leave behind when you die - "...but houses and stuff and wealth won't last 'forever'[see 2 Sam. 7:13 + 16]. Eventually they crumble and decay. Think instead about the 'offspring'[v.12] that you produce" - your children and all those you influence and meet - "*they* are the most important gift you can give to the future and to the world."

And the same is true for you and for me.

There's nothing more important than people.

God loves *people* much more than He loves *anything* else; more than the majestic whales or the graceful swan or the mighty rhino or even cute kittens. [see: Mt. 10:31/Lk. 12:7]

People are His priority.  
All people.  
And we should feel and act accordingly.

Let's pray:  
... in Jesus' name, amen.

[Ask children to leave.]

From our psalm this morning:

'If they break my statutes and do not keep my commandments, I will punish their transgressions with a rod and their iniquities with with the lash; but I will not take my love from [them], nor let my faithfulness prove false.' [v.31-32] [Pause.]

"Hell is other people."

Have you ever heard that phrase?

Most recently, I saw it written on a poster that hangs in my little sister's kitchen (in London) - in bright green and yellow paint; framed and everything.  
*Hell* is other people.

Now, if you've ever been on "the Tube" - that's the subway, there - during "rush hour," you wouldn't question this prominently placed artwork.

And maybe that's how you feel too?

I certainly have had my moments:

Standing in long queues in shops with little or no air-conditioning on a hot summer's day watching unruly children pestering their parents for every type of candy in the convenience-stand; or listening to somebody else's baby crying on the plane, interminably, for hours and hours and hours.

(Don't you ever just wish you could stand up, grab a parachute and step our the door?)

And if these other people that I'm seeing and hearing aren't "driving me up the wall" (with anger), then they very well might just arouse in me contempt - perhaps in Walmart or at the Gilley Pool;

the sight of the bloated, blubberous malnourished bodies of the poor.

"Why don't they just eat/smoke/drink less?"

"Where is their self-control? Their discipline, their manners, their etiquette?"

"Why don't they say 'please' more? And, "yes sir, right away sir."

And, "thank you for your sweaty, small change, sir"?

Where is their gratitude, their shame?

Why can't they be more like me?

If you can honestly say that you've never had any of these thoughts and nothing like them, then you are a much better person than I.

*But, let's be truthful here: we all have.*

We've all felt annoyance with the slow old lady in front of us at the supermarket, floundering in her purse for coupons you fully know she's left at home; or turned our faces away in disgust from the breath or body-odour of the homeless drunk seeking some charity.

And it's a problem.

A really *big* problem.[n.1]

I come across News stories all the time suggesting that most of us see our neighbours - our fellow citizens - as *nothing* more than a nuisance, an obstacle, a waste of breath [see: *Gen. 2:7*] and space.

Something we want as little of as possible.

I think one of the proofs of this is the spread *and spread* of "noise cancelling headphones." [n.2] ["Cup" hands over ears.] (I saw them *everywhere* at the airports this summer.)

I mean, I get the benefits.

But are they sooo important that we'd risk missing the final call announcement? Or that border-control cop by the metal-detector where you've to take your shoes off, shouting, "Get down, it's a bomb"?

No.

But this seems to be where we're going as a society.

More and more divided.

More and more disinterested in one another.

More and more litigious.

And we Episcopalians - which is a historically, *solidly* middle-class, left-leaning "whitebread" [n.3] denomination - we may be the worst culprits for disdaining others: commentators now say of the "culture wars" that it has 'metastasized' into a 'class struggle' [n.4] - of the few "Haves" against the many "Have-nots;" of 'the intensification of a long...tradition of anti-democratic [elitism (in our nations)]', [n.5] which seems to me undeniable: when you listen to the haughty venom in the voices of those on N. P. R or the B. B. C. disparaging (the many) Trump supporters or that majority who voted for "Brexit" in the U. K.

Are we so morally superior?

Because this is the implication of our snobbery; of our complaining.

That we are worth *more*.

But imagine, for a moment, that you are God.

Now, *here* is One who is entitled to gripe and grieve:

From almost the very beginning of our long existence, we have caused Him endless displeasure and heartache and frustration, and yet how does He respond?

Like this: (verse 34) 'As [Jesus] went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd...'

Why?

Where are the meteors from the sky that they deserve, the "fire and the brimstone?"

Because Jesus sees a truth that is lost on most of us: He sees that, in the "eyes" of Heaven - of holiness; of perfection, we're all (of us - everyone in this room and everywhere) - only separated from one another by the mildest and minutest degrees of superficiality:

All of us *mis*guided and *mis*shapen in various and sundry ways.

All of us needing to be *re*-educated, *re*-buked, *re*-formed in *His* (glorious) image: [Rom. 8:29, 12:2].

Only at the *very* end, when He returns from the Father's right-hand, will the (true) assessment finally come:

after we've had all the chances that we need to avail ourselves of His gracious "shepherding."

Only *then* can the just judgment be made.

And before that moment arrives, we should strive to be more like the Savior, giving everyone the benefit of the doubt.

Footnotes:

1. Gartland, Michael (28th of June 2017), 'Noise Complaints Reaching New Highs', *The New York Post*, available at <https://nypost.com/2017/06/28/noise-complaints-reaching-new-highs-amid-citys-new-rules/amp/> (accessed July 21, 2018).
2. Abrahamian, Atossa Araxia (13th of March 2014), 'Enjoy the Silence', *The New Yorker*, available at <https://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/enjoy-the-silence> (accessed July 21, 2018).
3. See the Urban Dictionary's definition here: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/>

[define.php?term=whitebread](#)

4. See: Paul, Darel E. (August 2018), 'Culture War as Class War', *First Things*, No. 285, pp. 39-44.
5. Black, Tim (20th of June 2016), 'We Trust the Demos More than the Experts: You don't need a PhD to understand the World and Want to Change It', *Spiked*, available at <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/we-trust-the-demos-more-than-experts/18473#.V4YUeVeDD8t> (accessed July 13, 2016).