

It is really, really great to be with you all this morning. As some of you know I was born and raised at Christ Church until I went to college in FL, and this place – this community – will always be a part of me. It is good to be home.

I don't know about you all, but I find that it's especially good to be home after I've been away for a while – to have the comforts of the familiar around me – to settle into my own bed, to walk the streets of my own neighborhood, or as the case may be for me today, to see the familiar faces of old friends and family, to rediscover the nooks and crannies that begat many a childhood conspiracy among playmates, to stand again at the railing where I received blessing after blessing and grace after grace.

There's something visceral about places that we call home – and most especially those buildings and structures that manifest all that home represents. They convey something of what is important to us and satisfy myriad needs from the practical and obvious to the emotional and elusive. This is especially the case when it comes to our religious homes and our houses of worship. They are precious to us.

Over the last twenty years, I have had the opportunity to travel to many places all over the world, and as you can imagine, I've spent a lot of time visiting various homes that humans have constructed for gods and men – palaces, castles, huts, cathedrals, temples and mosques – some humble, but most glistening with grandeur.

Among my most poignant experiences was my first visit to the Dome of the Rock, the Muslim religious shrine on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. This site was the location of two Jewish Temples before it, including the one David's son Solomon built as promised by God in today's reading from Samuel.

On the day of the visit, we had the privilege of approaching the Dome not by the tourist entrance, but by another gate that led to these long terraced steps leading up to the platform. I will never forget the site – and the feeling – I experienced after slowly ascending those steps, finally reaching the top and turning to see the Dome come into full view. I literally gasped for breath and felt the sensation of awe travel in

my body from head to toe, ending with a visible shiver. It was beautiful, but it was more than beautiful. It felt holy – every bit of it. I had just walked into a place that had been the site of human prayer for thousands and thousands and thousands of years. The air on that “high place” doesn’t just contain nitrogen and oxygen, but an incredible concentration of praises, hopes, laments, dreams, desires, and intercessions poured out to the God(s) of our ancestors for longer than any material trace can document.

It may very well be the case that the air on that high place contains a concentration of holiness, but I also wonder if my reaction would have been the same without the magnificent “material trace” – the glistening grandeur – of the Dome of the Rock. As I said, there’s something visceral we manage to pack into the buildings we construct, especially those with religious significance, so we often can’t help but be overcome with awe. These houses signify God’s presence – a way of capturing as best we can the feeling of intimacy and connection to the divine – and so we humans seem to need our buildings – we seem need to give God a home.

God, however, does not, and that is why, throughout scripture, there exists some tension about where God is and God isn’t, where God resides and doesn’t reside. Is it in the temple or outside the temple; in the church or outside the church? Is it with God’s chosen people or is it with all people everywhere? Where does healing take place? Inside the bounds of our sacramental life or outside the bounds of our sacramental life? The answer, played out quite nicely in today’s scripture readings is, of course, both/and.

In the reading from 1 Samuel, King David and the people of ancient Israel are finally at peace. After spending most of his life as a nomad in some for or another – shepherd, fugitive, warrior – David can finally rest in the peace of his beautiful new home. When David stops from all his labors, however, he realizes that while he now dwells in a house of cedar, God is still living in a tent, in a manner of speaking. David

decides that the Arc, which represents the presence of God among the people, deserves a permanent residence as well – something splendid for the presence and glory of God.

God, however, has other plans. Through the prophet Nathan, God informs David, “In good time, I will have a house, but for now, I’m perfectly content ‘being mobile, flexible, free to move about, not fixed in one place.’” What I want is a household first and foremost – a people – and that’s what I’m going to help you build – not something made of sticks and stones, but something made of living, breathing flesh and blood. I want a household, and you are going to be its inhabitants.”

A similar message is conveyed in the Gospel of Mark. The apostles, just back from their first missionary journey having been sent out two by two to preach, anoint and heal, are telling Jesus all that they had done and taught. But before they can even rest or eat, people are clamoring around them, clamoring to get to Jesus. No matter where they go – even to a deserted place – the people are there, desperate for wholeness and hope, desperate to get close enough to touch even the fringe of Jesus’ coat so that they might be healed.

And so, hundreds of years later, God again chose to move among the people – not tied to a particular place or a particular time, and to again establish a household through the person of Jesus Christ. Once again, this household wouldn’t be symbolized by a building constructed of cedar or stone – but by a community of people – people committed to living in the world with God-given freedom and flexibility and compassion. A people whose life would be governed by a sort of rhythm – gather and go out, gather and go out – gather as the Body of Christ and go out in to the world with the gift of compassion and healing and hope.

You know, this rhythm continues for us Christians today. Many of us are here because we have been touched by the promise and possibility of abundant life in Christ, and if we’ve been touched by this promise and possibility then surely we are

meant to share it with the world. Many of us are here because we believe that our lives are better having experienced the love of God in and through this particular community of faith, and if that is the case, then surely others should have the opportunity to experience it as well then. Since we believe these things, as Christians then our job is to continue to imagine what it means to embody God's compassion and healing and reconciliation and grace and love in the world. Our job is to gather and go out – to throw open wide the proverbial gates and take down every barrier between us and God's mission in the world.

With this in mind, then, the buildings in which we worship are gifts to us, to be preserved and cherished for sure, but they are not the exclusive residence of the Divine. They are not meant to capture our attention to the extent that we become distracted by their material traces of grandeur – to the extent that we linger over long within them – to the extent that we confuse our hope and our identity with the bricks and mortar that surrounds us. Rather they are places to be fed and inspired, to gather and worship, to tend and care for such that they convey God's welcome and love and embrace of all people – such that they convey the promise and possibility of abundant life in Christ so freely and lovingly offered to all. They are places to know and experience ourselves as fundamentally the beloved children of God and brothers and sister in Christ so that we can follow more faithfully the One who gathers us in, knits us together, and sends us out.

God doesn't REALLY need a house – because one of the most glistening manifestations of the grandeur of God isn't made of bricks and mortar. It's the love and compassion of God embodied in human hearts and hands and feet and sent out in witness to the active, engaged, life-giving presence of God at work in the world.