

**St. Andrew's Cathedral**  
Jackson, Mississippi  
Sermon for August 26, 2018 ~ Proper 16B  
The Very Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

This portion of Solomon's Prayer at the Dedication of the Temple (I Kings 8:27-30, 41-43) has always impressed me:

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, ‘My name shall be there,’ that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive.

“Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name – for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm – when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.”

Like so many before and after him, Solomon erected a physical monument to mark a place where the Divine Presence had been manifested. Thereafter, that place and that monument became revered as what some might call a “thin place” where the presence, mystery, and power of the Eternal could be experienced. The Unseen Deity dwelt in a physical structure and those who came there to worship the Deity would have their prayers answered and the hungers of their hearts satisfied.

What is especially fascinating to me is that Solomon, King of a specific and chosen race of people, makes it abundantly clear that the God whose glory dwelt in this physical Temple was not their private God. This God of Israel also answers the prayers of foreigners who are not of God's people Israel. How often people who think of themselves as God's own people have forgotten this kind of radically inclusive monotheism!

Several years ago, when Gay and I were visiting Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, I was impressed that they opened the great central doors in the west end of the Cathedral during the reading of the Gospel and at the time of the dismissal. As the procession passed through the worshipping congregation during the singing of the last hymn, everyone turned around and faced that open door. Then, at the end of the hymn, the Deacon gave the dismissal, “Let us go forth in the Name of Christ.” And we all responded, “Thanks be to God.”

I have borrowed that ceremonial custom in congregations where I have served, although people on the back pew have convinced me that there are some Sunday mornings when the weather is just too cold to open the doors. It seems to me to be a powerful way to remind ourselves that the Gospel with which we have been entrusted is not meant to be confined to our beautiful sacred building, but is for the world beyond those doors. When we are dismissed into that world, it reinforces the belief that the

nourishment we have received in Word and Sacrament inside the house of worship is to fortify us for the work God has prepared for us to do outside in the mission field at our doorstep. What happens inside the edifice with the gathered congregation is in the service of the purpose we are to pursue as we scatter after worship. It is not just to make us feel holy. It is to make it possible for us to be witnesses to God's holiness in the living of our lives.

As my mother used to say, "You may be the only bible some people ever read."

Whenever the structures of Christianity, whether our buildings or our governance, become more important than God's mission, we have drifted into idolatry. The God we worship cannot be contained in our structures any more than in the highest heaven. The God we worship is not our private God. The God we worship took on human flesh in Jesus Christ, went to and from the Temple, and *became* the Temple so that all people could be drawn to him when we lift him up. That is our mission, both inside and outside the structures we have created.

When these structures cease to serve that mission, we don't need to tear them down. But we do need to revise them so that they may be restored to their rightful purpose in service to the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of all Creation. For it is here that we are formed and reformed as the beloved community that serves as the alternative to the kind of hate and hurt we see in the world around us. It is here that weary souls find refreshment, hope, and healing. It is here that we come to hear the voice of the one who has the words of eternal life and feast upon the bread of life. In the words of St. Augustine of Hippo, we "behold what we are and become what we receive" so that we may be a sacrament to those to whom we are sent.