

Surely, the Presence of the Lord is in this Place

10th Weekend of Kingdomtide – August 12/13, 2006

Sermon Background Study

2 *Chronicles* 6:1-11 (NRSV)

Then Solomon said, “The LORD has said that he would reside in thick darkness. ²I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to reside in forever.”

³Then the king turned around and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel stood. ⁴And he said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who with his hand has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to my father David, saying, ⁵“Since the day that I brought my people out of the land of Egypt, I have not chosen a city from any of the tribes of Israel in which to build a house, so that my name might be there, and I chose no one as ruler over my people Israel; ⁶but I have chosen Jerusalem in order that my name may be there, and I have chosen David to be over my people Israel.’ ⁷My father David had it in mind to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. ⁸But the LORD said to my father David, ‘You did well to consider building a house for my name; ⁹nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for my name.’ ¹⁰Now the LORD has fulfilled his promise that he made; for I have succeeded my father David, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built the house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. ¹¹There I have set the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD that he made with the people of Israel.”

As we approach the 20th anniversary of St. Andrew, it is a good time to contemplate the meaning of place.

It is hard for us to comprehend the significance of the temple in Jerusalem to the lives of the ancient Israelites, but the books of the Chronicles can help our understanding. Writing long after the destruction of the temple built by Solomon, the Chronicler helps the people to grasp the importance of their work to rebuild the temple after their return to Jerusalem (see the page one text box.) He devotes 18 chapters to the story of the temple, its construction and its dedication. Throw in Hezekiah’s cleansing of the temple and you realize that the Chronicler devotes nearly a third of his history of Israel to the temple! So, let’s take a brief journey through the story of the temple.

Mount Sinai

Our first stop is at the foot of Mt. Sinai more than 3,300 years ago. God, manifested as a pillar of fire, has led the people to the mountain after their escape across the Red Sea. Now, Moses brings down from the mountain instructions for building a moveable dwelling place for God (the tabernacle) and for a box that will hold the stone tablets on which God has inscribed the Ten Commandments. God’s dwelling place with his people is a large tent that can be easily moved, as the people are still nomadic. Inside the tent is a small area that is curtained off. Behind the curtain sits the box, the ark of the covenant, containing the stone

The Book of Chronicles WHY??!!

Leslie Allen, Professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, calls the books of Chronicles the “Bible’s best-kept secret.” The secret part is definitely right. The *Revised Common Lectionary* is a three-year program of Scripture passages to be read and preached. It is used by many churches around the world. The Lectionary lacks a single passage from the books of Chronicles. Yet, Chronicles is every bit as much a part of the Bible as any other book. We don’t get to rank order the books in the canon. God has given us them all.

Still, as we’ve been reading through Chronicles in the last month as part of our *Thru the Bible* one-year Bible reading program, several people have asked me “Why?!” They don’t know what they are supposed to be getting out of Chronicles, because whatever it is, they aren’t.

The first nine chapters of genealogy after genealogy is enough to make many of us close the book and move on. But as we go on, we get a better sense of the Chronicler’s perspective and purposes.

Chronicles was written more than a century after the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem following its sacking by the Babylonians. The Jews had seen dreams shattered, homes destroyed, and families ripped apart. How could this happen to God’s people? Were they God’s chosen people after all? What did it all mean? In this light, those endless genealogies that open the book become the people’s concrete anchor to their past. They are not just any gathering of Semitic peoples. They are God’s people and have been for many centuries. They even know the names!

We aren’t surprised then that the Chronicler’s dominant theme is exile and restoration. He draws out the historical context for the Israelites’ series of exiles and the restoration after the Babylonian exile. The Chronicler understands that this is not just about political exile and restoration, but religious as well. The essence of Israel and its story was its relationship with God. Thus, the theme of exile and restoration was not only about history, it was also a metaphor about the relationship between God and his people. As Professor Allen puts it, “the metaphor providentially relates the overall success or failure of the community to its spiritual relationship to the Lord.” Always has. Always will.

tablets. The ark is covered with a “mercy-seat” on which sits two gold winged cherubim facing each other. God has said, “There I will meet you [Moses] and from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the covenant, I will deliver to you all my commands for the Israelites” (Exodus 25:22).

We can think of this place within the tabernacle and atop the ark as the place where heaven and earth met. It was where the Moses and then the high priests would step within God’s space and God’s time. It was the place where God’s world and our world would overlap. The key is to grasp that the ancient Israelites did not see this as some sort of metaphor, but more as a portal to the LORD God. Not surprisingly, this place was called the Holiest of Holies and could be entered only by the high priest and only on one day a year. This place, where God was present, was the focal point of Israel’s worship.

The New St. Andrew Academy

Five years ago, St. Andrew embarked on a plan to help ourselves become a more biblically literate congregation so that our lives might be grounded in the Word of God. A key part of this was the creation of the Bible Academy. Since then, more than 2,000 adults have taken classes in the Academy.

Several months ago, we decided to expand the diversity of classes offered in the Academy and to use it as a springboard for community outreach.

This fall, we are launching the new St. Andrew Academy, offering a diverse collection of fourteen classes, covering everything from the Bible to spiritual gifts to marriage to parenting and much more. Classes are offered Sunday through Wednesday evenings and during the day as well. There are discussion-oriented classes and lecture-based classes. There are large classes and smaller ones. Childcare is available. We’ve made it as easy as we can for you to take a class.

We have also prepared a brochure, a class catalog of sorts, that we are mailing to 25,000 homes in our area. We’ve launched a new Academy website, at which everyone can find class information, on-line registration, the archive of all the Sermon Background Studies, course materials for some of the classes, and more. The website address is simply:

www.standrewacademy.org

We hope that you will take a few minutes to look over the classes for this fall and sign up for one or more of them. We are confident that you will find it to be a rewarding and enjoyable experience – and we have the track record to back up our confidence.

Please be bold about asking friends or neighbors to join you. There are many St. Andrew members who have come to us first through an Academy class.

You won’t find a program quite like this anywhere in the metroplex. We hope you’ll want to be a part of this exciting new and renewed ministry.

Jerusalem

Today’s Scripture passage takes us to our next stop – Jerusalem. About 1,000 years before Jesus, Solomon built and dedicated a permanent dwelling for God, a marble and bronze version of the moveable tabernacle. Within this temple, sat the ark with the tablets and the place where heaven and earth met.

But if we fast forward a few hundred years to about 600BC, we find Jeremiah standing on the steps of the temple, calling it a den of thieves. The people have come to believe that they can ignore God’s command to love their neighbor so long as they wrap themselves in the majesty of the temple (Jeremiah 7:1-15). Even more foreboding is Ezekiel’s vision of God’s glory departing from the temple (Ezekiel 10). Not long after, in 587BC, the temple was burned to the ground and the ark of the covenant lost forever.

Our next stop is the rebuilding of the temple in the fifth-century BC, though it would only be a shadow of the temple Solomon had built. The people had no money. But more importantly, they had no ark and no tablets and no “mercy-seat.” They had refashioned a temple of sorts, but had God really returned?

We move forward another few centuries to the time of Jesus, who, invoking the words and actions of Jeremiah, pronounced judgment on the temple (Mark 11:15-19). Despite the temple’s central role in the religious life of the Jews, it had again taken them away from God, not toward God. And as it was centuries before, the temple is destroyed. This time by the Romans in 70AD. It has never been rebuilt.

Corinth

Our last stop is with Paul who, in his letters to the Corinthians, makes a remarkable claim. Paul writes that God has returned to his temple, though it is not the still-standing marble edifice in Jerusalem. Instead, it is the entire community of Christians, the body of Christ, who is God’s temple – collectively (see 1 Cor. 3:16-17, where the “you” is plural and collective). In addition, each believer is God’s temple – individually (see 1 Cor. 6:19-20 where the “you” is singular and individual). In short, beginning with Jesus and continuing with the Spirit, God is with his people as he never had been before. There is no more temple curtain separating the world from God’s presence. In Christ, the curtain has been torn in two (Mark 15:38). God’s presence and kingdom is visible for all the world to see.

Thru the Bible Daily Bible Readings

August 13-19

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help.

Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Sunday 2 Chronicles 31-33; Psalm 109 Hezekiah destroys the pagan shrines; Assyria pressures Judah; Hezekiah dies and is succeeded by Manasseh</p>	<p>Monday A day for reflection and catching up</p>
<p>Tuesday 2 Chronicles 34-36; Psalm 110 King Josiah rediscovers the Law, the covenant is renewed, and Passover is celebrated; Jerusalem falls to Babylon</p>	<p>Wednesday Obadiah; Psalm 111 Through Obadiah, God pronounces doom on Edom for taking advantage of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem</p>
<p>Thursday 2 Corinthians 1-3; Psalm 112 In a later letter to Corinth, Paul talks about his own plans and calls the Corinthian Christians to be ministers of the new covenant.</p>	<p>Friday 2 Corinthians 4-6; Psalm 11 We are clay jars holding God's great treasure; We are to live by faith</p>
<p>Saturday 2 Corinthians 7-9; Psalm 114 Paul is overjoyed at the church's repentance and encourages them to be generous to the collection that Paul is putting together for the Christians in Jerusalem</p>	

Sermon Notes

Announcing the new St. Andrew Academy!!
Registration is now on-line at www.standrewacademy.org
Look for the brochure in your mail

We've completely revamped the Bible Academy. It is now the St. Andrew Academy. We've added lots of new classes and teachers: marriage, parenting, spiritual gifts, missions, and more have been added to our classes on the Bible and spiritual formation. An all-new brochure has been designed and is being mailed to thousands of homes in our area. This is outreach! You can see the class schedule now and even register on-line at our new website: www.standrewacademy.org. Please register early!

Scott's class, *Something More*, meets in Wesley Hall at 9:30 every Sunday.

If you are not a part of a Sunday morning class, we hope that you'll visit our class. It is open to adults of all ages. We have more than ten small groups meeting now and a growing number of opportunities to meet other members of the St. Andrew community. If you are new to St. Andrew or just visiting, the class is a great way to begin getting connected. If you have questions, you are welcome to call Scott Engle at 214-291-8009 or e-mail him at sengle@standrewcccl.org.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

The NT teaching on the church is clear. It is the body of Christ, the community of faith, the people of God, that the New Testament writers mean when they refer to the church (*ekklesia* in the Greek). They do not mean any buildings. In the first-century, the Christians had no common buildings, they met in people's homes. But as this changed, as Christians began to build meeting places and sanctuaries, differences among Christians began to arise. We can see these differences still today. St. Patrick's Cathedral, or even St. Andrew, is a far cry from a Quaker meeting house or one of the large arenas used by some congregations.

I'm sure we'd all agree that no single building is God's dwelling place, as the ancient Jews believed was the case with the temple. But still, most of us would agree that some buildings, such as our own sanctuary, have a sacredness that other buildings do not. Do you agree? What makes a building sacred? The purpose to which it is put? What difference does architecture make? What feeling do you have walking into some churches and not others?

What does the architecture of St. Andrew say to a passerby about our church? What should it say? How important is "place" in your own faith? Do you feel closer to God in the sanctuary or in the chapel or somewhere else? If so, why do you think that is? What is it about such a place that makes you feel closer to God? Do you think that some places are more suitable for worship than others? Why? How so?