

**“Where Does God Live?”**

**II Samuel 7.1–14a**

**The Rev. Hal Chorpensing, Plymouth Cong’l UCC, 23 July 2006**

David is feeling guilty. God has given him everything, and David has just built a 10,000-square-foot McMansion with hot and cold running servants, not to mention the incredible water feature in the west garden, and David realizes that he has left God in a tool chest out in the Tuff Shed next to the garage.

Does this seem a bit unlikely to you? Does God *really* live in a box? Perhaps some of the ancient Israelites thought so...or not. God isn’t in a box when he speaks to Moses on Mt. Sinai, nor when she creates the cosmos, nor when she calls down fire on the prophets of Ba’al. (Though the Levites were pretty sure God resided in the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum of the Temple in Jerusalem...the new shed David built!)

The story really centers not so much on the house that David builds for God, as on the house God builds for David. In Hebrew, as in English, the word *house* can mean either a residence or a dynasty. Unlike the house that David built for God, the House of David will endure forever.

It does raise the question, though: Where does God live?

When I was a divinity student, my favorite class was called Confluent Education, which brought together the streams of developmental thought of Jean Piaget and Robert Fowler together with the multiple intelligence theory of Howard Gardner. One of the projects the teacher, Ed Everding, asked those of us with children to do was to interview them as an example of the ways children think in the various stages of their development. Ed read a wonderful dialogue he had recorded with his son Henry, about twenty years prior. And five-year-old Henry was quite sure that Jesus’ Parable of the Lost Sheep was really about sheep, not about people who might have gotten off track.

At any rate, I interviewed Cameron, who was then two and a half about his perceptions about God. (Cameron and I read part of this together in a sermon a few years back.) So, here are Cameron’s reflections about God about eight years ago:

**Hal:** Cameron, Where is God?

**Cam:** God lives in *my* house.

**Hal:** Have you ever seen God?

**Cam:** Yeah. God is a boy and a girl. He’s a nice guy. God is a boy and a girl.

**Hal:** Does God talk to you?

**Cam:** *Yes!*

**Hal:** What does God say?

**Cam:** “Hi, Cameron!”

**Hal:** And what do you say to God?

**Cam:** “Thank you, God.”

**Hal:** Why do you say, “Thank you?”

**Cam:** (*mildly annoyed at such a stupid question*) For talking to me!

“God lives in my house.” That’s a pretty cool assumption for a young kid to make, and although his mother and I think so, Cameron is not totally unique in that kind of perception. We just tend to lose that over the years as we “mature,” and it takes a long time for us to get back to the stage of “postcritical naiveté” when we can appreciate things without having to judge them to death.

*Home* is a very important concept for us...not just our home, but where God is at home as well. Have you ever been out on the plains looking westward toward the Front

Range, soaking in the vista of an orange sunset over the mountains, and thought to yourself: *this is God's country*. (Well, maybe not, but I had to use that cliché somehow.)

So, let me ask you to consider that question: *Where does God live?*

Other religious traditions have sacred places where they envision God living, whether it's on the Holy hill of Zion, Mount Olympus, or the Izumo Shrine in Japan. Whether a temple, a mountaintop or a shrine, the idea of sacred space is fairly universal, and in most cases it's the *expensive* real estate. But think of this: isn't it a bit counterintuitive to think of God taking human form and choosing to be born to an unmarried peasant woman...in a stinking stable of all places?!

And that begs the question: *what is sacred space?* If you are a Roman Catholic or an Episcopalian, you create it by having a priest consecrate the space, such as a church or even a cemetery. And if such sites are no longer used for those purposes, they must be deconsecrated by a priest.

Our Congregational tradition is markedly different. From the outset our Pilgrim and Puritan forbears understood "church" never as a building, but as a gathering of people bound together by covenant. One of the earliest church covenants in this country is from First Church in Salem, Massachusetts, which is now a Christian Unitarian congregation (and, yes, home to the famous witch trials). That congregation still says these words each Sunday during worship: "We covenant with the Lord and one with another and do bind ourselves in the presence of God to walk together in all his ways, according as he is pleased to reveal himself unto us in his blessed word of truth."

So, if the church is a covenanted group of people walking on a faith journey with God and each other, what is this building we're in? In New England, it would typically have been called a meetinghouse. Its function is to be a place of assembly where the church can gather in worship or learning...or even as a place to hold the town meeting. Historically, the meetinghouse was not understood as space that was any more sacred than your living room. There would have been no altar, no stained glass, no paraments, and no cross. Pews, pulpit, and communion table...everything else was extraneous. It was no more "the house of God" than the tool shed behind your house.

Two important points: 1) Where in the New Testament do we read about a church establishing a building exclusively set aside for worship and requiring consecration by a priest or bishop? (In many ways, we regard our place of worship the same way Jews regard a synagogue, a Greek word meaning gathered together.) 2) It points toward the idea that everyplace is sacred space, not because a human says so and then offers a prayer. So this sanctuary is sacred space, and the landfill down on Taft Hill Road is also sacred space. Remember the psalm from last Sunday? "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." *It's all sacred space.*

This space is made special because its beams carry the weight and the work of the faithful folk who built it. It is set apart as the place where we all have worshipped, shed tears, sang, laughed, and walked together with the Lord. It holds precious memories of countless baptisms, weddings, and funerals. What consecrates this space is not the blessing of a priest; it is set apart because you have blessed it with your prayers, your fears, your hopes, your dreams, and your faith.



So, where does God live? Psalm 139 says, "You are behind me and before me, O God. You lay your hand upon me...Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast." God is not in a box

in the Temple. God is far beyond our definition and understanding. Yet God isn't only "out there" in the great beyond. The apostle Paul wrote that "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you."<sup>1</sup> Many of us – Christians, Muslims, Jews, and other – have come to realize is that God lives in our hearts. God is within each of us, at the same time that God is beyond us, at the same time as God is among us.

As the old Christmas carol says, "let every heart prepare him room."  
Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> I Cor 6.19