

# Sermon Text for May 15, 2022

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

*I Kings 9:1-5, Matthew 21:10-13*

*“The house of the Lord”*

Yesterday we had our annual mulch day and were able to finish the job in about an hour and bit of change. It was great to be with people who cared about what the church looks like and put things in order and make things look pretty and nice for the day. There is some pride that we all take in the state of our building which means an investment of time and also of finances. We’ve been talking a bit about the organ and how you were so generous in donating over \$70,000 toward the project and that we have been able to pay off our first two payments without dipping into our memorial fund.

Starting next spring we will also be doing some pretty major renovations as we will be blowing out the entry way to make it more inviting as well as transitioning our bathrooms so that they are ADA compliant. That should be about \$300,000, and again, we are going to be able to do that without the need for a capital campaign, which means asking you, our church membership, to give more than what you are already giving.

I think there can always be a voice of dissension and questioning as to why are we spending nearly half a million dollars on things that aren’t really necessary when things work just fine around here? We could use that money to feed the poor, or to increase our staffing for our growing youth and children’s ministries, we could put that money to programs and materials. Some would even see the investment in an organ and remodeling as a total waste since it could go elsewhere. I’ve heard some people say that. I understand that, and today we are going to talk about the house of the Lord and there are some very significant points of contact within Scripture that just might help us as we make our way through this discussion.

We see in Scripture that the place of worship in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament is significant even while the people and the relationships that take place within those buildings remain significant and the primary focus. The importance of the house of the Lord is both geographic and sacred. The house of the Lord, the church, is not something to be cast aside, but rather something that Scripture tells us is necessary holy. This building means something. It is not just a building. There is something sacred about this space. And there is nothing wrong in considering this place a holy place. Let’s read

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As we make our way through the Bible we find ourselves in a place where Solomon, King Solomon, the son of King David through Bathsheba, has finished building the temple of God, what is called the house of the Lord, that is where we get our sermon title for today. If you read in vs.3 you can see God says to Solomon: "I have put my name there forever." So without a doubt the temple is a significant location. To this day you have the people of God, the Israelites, who wail at the Western Wall of the Temple because they mourn the loss of this location, they mourn the loss of this structure which has been identified in Scripture as the house of the Lord.

Now, let's be clear, it was not assumed that God lived in the temple and only in the temple. There may have been times that I have said as much from this pulpit. This week, I saw a different perspective. Look at I Kings 8:49 where we hear where God resides: Then hear in heaven, your dwelling place, their prayer and their plea. Now, God is not a prisoner to the temple or to this church, God is present in us and among us, so no one is saying that the church, or the temple, is the only place where God resides or the only place where is manifested. We know better than that from our own experiences and our own lives.

But the temple, the church, is seen throughout history as the place where people go to worship God and also as a place where people go to get God's attention. This is true in the building of the temple by Solomon, but also true in Jesus' day where there was no more important location in all of Judaism than the temple itself. Our first reading is the completion of the temple, and our second reading is Jesus who finds himself after his entry into Jerusalem at that same temple and an encounter that he has at that temple.

The story of Jesus driving out the businesses from the temple has been used for a variety of reasons. But it is important to focus on the words of Jesus to understand why he did what he did. Okay, let's set the stage. It is Palm Sunday, Jesus enters into Jerusalem and the crowd goes wild. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Scripture says that the whole city shook with the people's voices and with the presence of Jesus.

The first thing that Jesus chooses to do when he enters Jerusalem is to go into the temple. That should not seem strange. When he gets into the temple court, so not the holy of holies where the people are gathered to hear and read the Torah and to worship God directly, but in the outside courts you would have people who would be selling doves and animals and trading money, all of which was necessary in order for people to worship God the way that they were commanded by God to worship him. You had to make sacrifices to God after certain moments in your life in order to be made ritually clean to approach God and be in community with those around you.

The money changers were important because the people had to take the Roman coins that they had in order to change them to the temple coin in order to buy the sacrifices. So it isn't an outside trade that is taking place, it isn't a side hustle that is going on, all of this was necessary according to the law. Jesus comes into the temple with the crowd behind him, and begins to drive out the money changers and the buyers and the sellers of the goods. Not just the sellers, not just the business people, but the ones buying them as well. The young mom who just had a baby and had to sacrifice a dove, Jesus drove her out. The leper who was had finally healed of his leprosy, Jesus would have driven him out.

But it wasn't the business practice that angers Jesus, but rather their location. We know that because of what he says and he uses two Scriptures to back up his actions. Look at vs.13 and it is a combination of two Scriptures, Isaiah 56:7 where we read: ... Look at the emphasis there and the purpose of the Lord's house. For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. We know from this that the house of the Lord is to be a house of prayer. We do that here.

Then the second part of that verse we find in Jeremiah 7:11 - ..., but it is actually really important to read starting in vs.9: . The church is not a place where you can go, confess your sins and be cleansed of your sin, and then go out again and sin in abundance. We aren't in the business of clearing your conscience so that you can go out and sin even more.

Now we know that the business had to happen in order to fulfill the law, but it did not have to happen in the temple courts. It could have happened on Mt. Olives as you made your way into Jerusalem outside of the city. That was not what the temple was made for. The market inside the temple represented to Jesus the secularization of the temple by the worshippers. For Jesus this is a house of prayer, not a place where the world's agenda is carried out with the blanket or the shield of the cross.

We know that from Jesus' words, how important the house of the Lord is, to what he does next. We didn't read the next few verses, but you need to read the next few verses in order to understand what the purpose of the house of the Lord is to Jesus, and how it can be manifested as a house of prayer. In vs. 14 we read that the blind, the lame came to him and he cured them. Right there in the temple in the temple, in the house of the Lord.

You see, the money changers according to the secular view of the religious needed to be there in order for the buyers to fulfill their religious duties. While the lame and those that Jesus healed after he drove the others out were not supposed to be in the temple area because according to the law they were not welcome. Jesus welcomes them. All are welcome into the

house of the Lord as long as they are seeking the presence of the Lord and not driving the agenda that the world is looking to profit from.

We find ourselves evolving as we come out of Covid and as more and more people come back into worship. We are starting to average around 180 every Sunday with about even distribution each Sunday. Before Covid we averaged about 150 in the first service and about 90 in the second service. We are now about 90 and 90. Naomi's church in Florida where she attends as soon as they started meeting in person stopped streaming the services. They wanted everyone to come and worship at the church. Now, we would never do that, but I understand why they did that. But I love how we have a community that we know every Sunday is worshipping at home whether they need to or not. And that community is spread out all over the world.

But when we do not gather in the same way that we used to it has an impact. I've told you already the impact that it is having on the numbers, we are about 25% down after yearly growth of about 5% every year. The impact has been seen also in finances. While we are able to rely upon some major resources, our budget is taking a hit because of the numbers. We are down a certain percent which is going to have an impact on both mission giving and I hope not, but probably on our decision making like going from full time to part time youth worker. It is having an impact on who is willing to serve in the church leadership. Do you know that in July Karen Bachman is going to be ordained. What a celebration that this church is able to produce men and women who feel called to the ordained pastoral ministry.

But when you get ordained you are no longer a member of the church and so our session will go to 7 members when in full capacity we are 12. We are also short on deacons and the Trustees keep plugging away. So when people do not come to the house of the Lord, it has an impact, and I have to say, it is a negative impact, but just like I told a member of the church on Friday who has not come back yet since Covid, no one is pressuring you to come back, everyone comes back when they are comfortable and ready. That remains our message.

The house of the Lord, yes, this church is the house of the Lord, but we also can't forget that we are called to be the house of the Lord. Read I Corinthians 3:16...You, yourselves, are God's temple. So whether you are here, in this temple, in this church, or at home, you are called to be the house of the Lord. Amen.