

SERMON TITLE: "Dwelling in God's House of Worship"  
SERMON TEXT: 2 Chronicles 29:20, 25-31  
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James  
OCCASION: October 23, 2016, at First UMC

### **INTRODUCTION**

If you weren't here for the Craft Bazaar this week, you might not realize that we had a lot going on—not only in the narthex and classrooms, but right here in the sanctuary. We had eight vendor tables set up in the back of the sanctuary, four tables in front of the pews, and three more tables up here in the chancel. Right here where the pulpit usually stands, there was a booth where you could get your picture taken with a scarecrow. There was a lot of hustle and bustle, smiles and fun, and dollars raised for our United Methodist Women's mission outreach. The money raised goes to great causes—the Lantern House homeless shelter, the Joyce Hansen Hall Food Bank, the YCC domestic violence shelter, Family Counseling Services, and the Ogden Rescue Mission—as well as some to our own church.

If, when you walked into the sanctuary this morning, you didn't perceive that all that had happened here, it might be because, somehow, with all that going on, we still got ready for a normal worship service today. Even though Brenda had lots of interruptions in the office, she was still able to prepare the bulletin. Even though I spent time talking with many people, I still managed to get ready for this sermon. Even though they had to adapt to some space issues on Wednesday evening, the choir was still able to hold a rehearsal and get ready to sing for us today. And even though they had already worked for many days setting up and selling goods, our vendors and church volunteers mustered enough energy to do a great job cleaning up after the bazaar came to an end yesterday afternoon. Raising money for missions is a wonderful thing that we Christian people do. But preparing for Sunday is important too. All the good efforts in the world would fall short if we didn't also take time to focus our hearts and connect with God through worship.

During this four-week stewardship drive, we're thinking about the importance of dwelling in God's house. Last Sunday, we started off with the story of Jacob dwelling in God's house of dreams. Today we're moving on to the story of King Hezekiah in Second Chronicles. Let's see what Hezekiah and his people did, and how that might direct us in dwelling in God's house of worship.

### **1—BIBLE STORY**

Chapter 29 tells us that dwelling in God's house of worship was King Hezekiah's number one priority. Verse three indicates that, "in the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them." This was no small matter. If you know any of the history of Israel, you may recall that the kingdom was united by David about 1000 years before Christ. After David died, his son Solomon consolidated the kingdom even further and built the first temple. But, in the generations that followed, there was a civil war, a divided kingdom, a devastating Assyrian assault on the northern kingdom of Israel, and a very close call in the southern kingdom of Judah. By the time King Hezekiah took the throne about 300 years after Solomon, the Jewish temple had suffered significant wear and tear.

Even if every generation had done everything in their power to make regular repairs to the roof, the walls, and the pillars, 300 years would have definitely taken a toll. But, sadly, not every generation took seriously the need to dwell in God's house of worship. Instead of worshiping God in the temple, many of them had worshiped at the altars of Baal up on the hills. Instead of spending their resources on maintaining God's house, they had used their precious metals to cast idols to false gods. Their attention and their resources were diverted in other directions. As Hezekiah said in 2 Chronicles 29:6, their "ancestors [had] been unfaithful and [had] done what was evil in the sight of the Lord their God; they [had] forsaken God, and [had] turned their faces and their backs from the dwelling of the Lord." But, after witnessing Assyria conquer the northern kingdom of Israel and imminent threats against Judah, Hezekiah believed there was no time to spare. His people needed God's support. Judah needed to be in

a covenant relationship with God. So, as soon as King Hezekiah was inaugurated, he began restoring worship as the number one priority of his administration.

For Hezekiah, dwelling in God's house of worship meant repairing the building so it would be functional and safe. The worship space, the holy sanctuary, had become compromised and cluttered with outside influences. In verses five and following, we see that King Hezekiah ordered the Levites to get rid of everything that contaminated and interfered with proper worship of God. They were also supposed to clean and purify those tools and implements of worship which belonged to God's house.

Once those basic steps were taken to sanctify and consecrate God's dwelling place, then Hezekiah organized the officials, priests, and Levites to begin enacting the rituals of worship. Verses 25-30 give details about the music. There were cymbals, harps, lyres, trumpets, and lots of singing. There were specialized music leaders who made all that happen. The singing was done with praise and gladness. These same verses tell us that dwelling in God's house of worship also involved rituals of standing up and bowing down. King Hezekiah, the city officials, and all who were with them bowed down in humble prayer and worshiped.

Chapter 29 indicates that dwelling in God's house of worship also included rituals of sacrifice for various kinds of offerings. Verse 32 tells us that the animals that were slaughtered numbered in the hundreds and thousands. Sometimes the meat of those animals went to provide sustenance for those who worked in the temple. It was their form of compensation. It was how those priests and Levites fed their families. Other times, the consecrated meat was given back to the donors to use for their own families or to share with the poor. Like a potluck dinner at church, sacrificial animals were often the main dish of a religious celebration. And sometimes, the meat, or at least the fat, was completely burned up as a pure offering of gratitude to God for the mercy and blessings God poured out upon the people.

Yes, dwelling in God's house of worship was a costly practice, but one that strongly connected the worshipers with the God who offered grace for the sinful, healing for the sick, freedom for the slave, laws for the lawless, and hope for the grieving and distressed. The rituals of sacrifice at the temple united the people with God and each other and helped them to stand strong against their enemies. The livestock offerings were highly valued, but giving those sacrifices was less painful because of the many blessings bestowed by God. As verse 31 indicates, those who brought the burnt offerings did so with "willing hearts." Verses 35 and 36 tell us that "all the people rejoiced" at how God helped them restore the service of worship in the house of the Lord.

## **2—DWELLING IN GOD'S HOUSE OF WORSHIP TODAY**

Fortunately, dwelling in God's house of worship today doesn't involve the sacrifice of animals. The Christians who wrote the New Testament interpreted Jesus' crucifixion as more than enough death and bloodshed for the rest of time.

But, in our acts of worship, you could say that we sacrifice other things. We sacrifice trees to make our paper bulletins. We sacrifice coal and natural gas as we use electricity and heat our sanctuary. If you drove here to worship, you sacrificed some gasoline in your tank. In the creation and burning of all those fuels, we sacrifice some air quality. To come here to worship, we sacrifice time that we could spend doing other things and with other people. Participating in this ministry of worship, we also sacrifice our dollars, which compensate the specialized leaders of our music and preaching and help maintain our building, so that it is a safe, holy, and dedicated dwelling place for God. Just this week, we've been getting bids to repair and repaint the outside of our church. The bids are coming in around \$16-\$20,000. Dwelling in God's house of worship is expensive. It requires sacrifices from all of us.

Fortunately, though, our sacrificial giving to God through this church has many benefits. All the reasons King Hezekiah made worship a priority are still valid today. We may not have Assyria or Babylon breathing down our necks in quite the same way that Judah did, but the only way we can stand strong is

if we are confident that God is on our side. We gain this confidence through our acts of worship. As we pray and receive God's mercy; as we read scriptural promises and obtain guidance; as we lift our voices in song; as we smile, hug, and care for each other; as we work together to improve our community and ease human suffering in the world; and as we give thanks and praise to God—our stress is reduced, our joy is increased, and our hope is brightened. We become stronger, more resourceful, and more resilient. When we give ourselves over to God in a wholehearted, dwelling-in-God's-house-of-worship relationship; when we devote ourselves to praise and prayer without guilt; when we believe that God is able to help, heal, and make whole—then we are able to resist the powers of evil that would harm and destroy. With God's faithful help, we are able to sing with gladness, even in the face of adversity.

### **CONCLUSION**

It's true that dwelling in God's house of worship is a sacrifice that will cost us our time, our talents, and our treasure. But there's something to be said for making a sacrifice of praise to God who is such an ever-present help in trouble, who forgives our sins, and gives us hope.

Over the next couple weeks, I urge you to think and pray about what God would have you pledge for the ministries of our church in the coming year. When you bring your pledge card to worship on November 6<sup>th</sup>, I hope you will make as generous a commitment as you possibly can. As Hezekiah has shown us, there is so much to gain from dwelling in God's house of worship.