

SERMON TITLE: "Dwelling in God's House of Hope"  
SERMON TEXT: Hebrews 3:1-6  
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James  
OCCASION: November 6, 2016, at First UMC

### **INTRODUCTION**

Seventy-one years after playing in their last World Series and 108 years since their last win of that ultimate baseball contest, the Chicago Cubs won their long-awaited victory. This season's top-notch Cubs earned a championship not only for themselves, and for their following all over the country, but especially for their hometown Chicago fans who had loyally endured the Cub's curse for generations. The joy of hope-finally-realized could not be contained. On Friday afternoon, rivers of Cubbie blue flowed through Chicago streets toward Grant Park where the celebration turned into a bright blue sea of about five million fans. Finally, after all those decades of cheering for their team, the never-give-up Chicago dwellers won the reward of their hope.

For the past three weeks we've been talking about dwelling in God's house. The story of Jacob stirred our imaginations about dwelling in God's house of dreams. The story of King Hezekiah inspired us about dwelling in God's house of worship. Then, last Sunday, we heard the Prophet Isaiah proclaiming the promise of dwelling in God's house of prayer for all people. Today, we move from the Old Testament to the New, and we find in Hebrews an opportunity for dwelling in God's house of hope.

### **1—WE ARE GOD'S HOUSE**

According to Hebrews 3:1-6, dwelling in God's house of hope is possible for at least three reasons. The first and most obvious reason is found in verse 6, which says, "We are God's house." If we are God's house, then dwelling in it should be no problem, right? The imagery here is something like the New Testament imagery of the body of Christ. Just like we are the hands, feet, eyes, ears, and mouth of the body of Christ, representing Christ in the world—so are we the bricks, the steel

beams, the 2x6s, the plywood, and the windows of God's house. We are building supplies chosen by God, to be built up together into a spiritual house. We have great hope because God loves us enough to put us to good use, so that even we can be God's house.

### **2—GOD'S HOUSE OF HOPE IS BUILT BY GOD**

Now, I know that some of us might question God's judgment in building a house using flawed materials like us. We might not be all that confident or proud of a dwelling place that was made out of our rough-hewn and "knotty" boards. Fortunately, we have good news. Dwelling in God's house of hope is dependent on more than us.

According to Hebrews 3:4, dwelling in God's house of hope means dwelling in a house built by God. Verse 4 says that God is the builder of all things, and "all things" certainly includes God's house. No one else could build something so magnificent as God's dwelling place. God may employ sub-contractors and laborers, but God is the master architect and general contractor. If anyone can create something good out of us, it would be God.

In recent months, the Trustees have been studying some spots on the siding of our church. It appears the siding has been damaged by water—probably because the siding wasn't treated and painted correctly when this building was constructed. Eight-and-a-half years later, it's impossible to hold the construction company or the painters responsible. So, we've gotten bids and chosen a company to make some repairs. They will do some replacement and caulking work beginning tomorrow, and then they'll either paint this fall or next spring, depending on the weather.

Unfortunately, most building projects have flaws of some kind or other. No matter how carefully we work, we human beings make mistakes. Psalm 127:1 tells us, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." We are imperfect creatures. But the good news is we aren't dwelling in a house of hope built by human hands. According to Hebrews 3, God's house of hope is built by God.

### **3—GOD’S HOUSE OF HOPE IS OVERSEEN BY GOD’S SON JESUS**

Another reason why dwelling in God’s house of hope is possible for us is that God’s house is overseen by God’s son Jesus. In previous times, told about in the Old Testament, the overseer of God’s house was the servant Moses. The writer of Hebrews gives Moses great credit by twice quoting Numbers 12:7, which says that “God’s servant Moses was faithful in all God’s house.”<sup>1</sup> The law of God that came through Moses formed and shaped the Hebrew people. Moses’ teachings gave the Jews their government, their culture, and their spiritual life. But now, says the writer to the Hebrews, someone better than Moses has come. No longer is God’s house ruled by the faithful servant Moses. Now, the house of God is cared for by the faithful son Jesus Christ.

In our American society, we don’t think so much about the difference between servants and sons. But, if you ever watch British dramas on TV, you might be aware of how this servant and son contrast works out. An adult servant might have authority over a young child. But eventually, the son or daughter of the mansion gains the upper hand. The servant must bow to the superior authority of the youthful master or mistress.

The author of Hebrews had no desire to put down Moses. The point of this contrast is rather to lift up Christ as the ultimate source of our hope. In Hebrews 4, verses 8 and 9, we read that Jesus gives us hope because, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.”

Jesus became our source of salvation because he was no ordinary son. In Hebrews 3:1, the writer describes Jesus as an apostle and high priest. An apostle was a messenger, someone who was sent. In this case, the son Jesus was sent by God to manage and oversee God’s house. That makes sense to us. Like Moses, Jesus was given the responsibility of teaching us how to love God and one another.

What surprises us more about God's son is that Hebrews describes him as a high priest. We're trained, from our reading of the gospels, to think of Jesus as the son of a carpenter who eventually became an itinerant preacher and healer, who taught in synagogues and outdoors. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John don't tell us that Jesus had any priestly duties. If anything, we sense that Jesus was in conflict with the priests in the temple and that the High Priest Caiaphas sent Jesus to Pilate for a death sentence. But the Letter to the Hebrews extensively uses this imagery of the Jewish high priest, who once per year, on the Day of Atonement, would go behind the curtain in the temple into the holy of holies and make a sacrifice for the forgiveness of the people. Hebrews indicates that, unlike the normal high priests, who sacrificed bulls and goats year after year, Jesus made a sacrifice of himself, once and for all, so that all who lived in God's house would have eternal salvation. In Hebrews 6:19-20, we are told that "we have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever."

The case made here in the Letter to the Hebrews is that Jesus was an extraordinary son who was both an apostle from God and a high priest who offers us eternal salvation. We might not have confidence or pride in our own role in God's house. But dwelling in God's house of hope is possible because the house of hope is overseen by God's son Jesus.

### **CONCLUSION**

Throughout these four weeks of our stewardship drive, I've been keenly aware that some members of our church are distressed by events in our United Methodist denomination. In this past week, I haven't been sleeping very well, and maybe, in part at least, it's because of my worries that some of you may reduce your financial giving in 2017. But we Christians aren't called to live in a state of anxiety and distress. So, I'm preaching to myself as much as to you that we Christians are called to be a people of hope, always looking for the good news, always holding firm with confidence

in God and Jesus. We're called to remember that God loves us enough to use us, flawed and conflicted as we are, as building materials in God's house. We're called to remember that it isn't us making the decisions about this construction project. God is the builder of God's house. And, as faithful as the lawgiver Moses was, we Christians have moved on past the servant to the son. Our spiritual well-being comes not through obeying the laws of Moses, but through the perfect suffering and self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the high priest who, once and for all, brought about our eternal salvation. Within the mortal human church, conflicts may come and conflicts may go, but our confidence rests in dwelling in God's house of hope.

In closing, I want to lift up the lyrics of a song. We know the chorus best, but listen also to the words of the first verse, which come straight out of Psalm 91:

You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord,  
Who abide in his shadow for life,  
Say to the Lord, "My Refuge,  
My Rock in whom I trust."

And God will raise you up on eagle's wings,  
Bear you on the breath of dawn,  
Make you to shine like the sun,  
And hold you in the palm of his hand.<sup>2</sup>

As long as we trust in the refuge of God, we can be confident of dwelling in God's house of hope.

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<sup>1</sup>The writer of Hebrews quoted from the Septuagint version of the Old Testament.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Joncas, c. 1979.