

We're in the 6th week of a series of 9 OT lessons this summer that center on the life of King David. And this week's lesson is rather different, in that it does not center on what David does. Instead, it's about what David hopes to do.

At this point, David has become king. And he has solidified his throne, defeating all opposition, foreign and domestic.

Which is where we pick up today:

"The king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him." David doesn't have to worry about military or political threats.

And so he turns his mind elsewhere. And he turns his mind in a good direction, towards God. He summons the prophet Nathan and says,

"See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent."

Lots of subtext to this verse. David now has a palace. He's living the good life. He's also brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. This is the box which is God's symbolic throne, the box containing, among other things, Moses' stone tablets with the Ten Commandments inscribed on them. If you're a movie fan, yes, this is the Ark from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. And up until David's time, the Ark has largely been left in the Tabernacle, a tent, a sort of portable temple. David has a permanent dwelling place. He wants the Ark of the Covenant to have a permanent dwelling place as well.

So he expresses that thought to the prophet, Nathan. And Nathan responds, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

Was Nathan too hasty? Should he have at least prayed about it? Perhaps. But on the other hand, it sounds like a good idea. The king now has a permanent palace. Shouldn't the Ark, God's symbolic throne, also have a permanent place? Sounds good.

Well, God has different ideas. He speaks to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in?" And as God speaks, the answer becomes, "apparently not."

It seems the prophet Nathan answered too quickly. And that's an important reminder for all of us. Nathan assumes that he knows God's will. He thinks his own thoughts and God's thoughts must be the same. And so he is guilty of a sin of presumption. We have many ideas pass through our minds. Some of them might be congruent with God's will. But we mustn't be too hasty or too presumptuous in assuming that we have an automatic lock on what God wants.

The prophet Nathan made that mistake. We have to be careful as well. What I think is a good idea, and what God thinks is a good idea may not be the same thing.

So God has to rein Nathan in. 'Time out Nathan. Whoa there prophet.'

God basically says, 'I've been fine with the tent. Did I ever ask for a house?' And then God talks about establishing David's house, David's dynasty. And he concludes with a message for David,

"(Your son)-- He shall build a house for my name."

God is saying through Nathan, 'David, it's not going to be your job to build my temple. That job belongs to someone else. It may be your hope and dream. But it's not my desire. It's not my plan nor my will that you build my temple.' In a nutshell, God tells David, "No."

That's a tough thing to deal with spiritually, when God says, "No." We want God to be a vending machine. Insert prayer, get a "Yes." But God doesn't work that way. Sometimes God says, "Yes." Oftentimes God says, "Wait." And sometimes God says, "No."

Of course, loving parents know that to indulge a child's every whim is one of the most un-loving things possible. A parent who says "Yes" to everything is irresponsible. Thus I can rationalize, and say that it is necessary for God to often answer prayers with a "No."

But that doesn't make it any easier when it's my prayer! What do you do when God says, "No" to you?

Well there are three basic possibilities. There are three basic responses to a divine, "No."

1. You ignore it. This is the response of rebellion. God, you're not going to make it happen for me? Well, I'll show you. I'll try to do it on my own.

I don't know about you, but in my life, this has been a disastrous response. Setting yourself up 180° in opposition to God is a no-win situation.

And, to make it even tougher, God will often allow you to go down your own path. God's response is, 'You want to do things your way? Go for it!'

But after a while of going the wrong way, you realize that you've made a mess of things. You find that things are worse than when you started. Rebellion is not a good answer to a divine "No."

Which leads to response #2. You resent it. You get mad at God. It's time for a pity party. 'God you won't give me what I want? Then God, you must not love me very much.' While this may be emotionally satisfying for a time, it is a dead-end response.

How can we possibly accuse God of not loving us after all that he's done for us? God is the most loving being imaginable. To claim anything to the contrary is absurd.

Which brings us to response #3. Trust. Acceptance. 'God, I may not like this answer, but I'll have to trust you.'

Actually, this is David's response. Our lesson ends, but afterwards, David offers such a response to God. It's not rebellious. And it's not resentful. Instead, it's thankful.

He basically says, 'Thank you God for all you've done for me. And thank you for the promises you've made concerning my dynasty. You are great. You are God. And I am your servant.'¹ Trust and acceptance, that's David's response.

I don't know about you, but in my life, I'm thankful for the times God has said "No." Because I'm very capable of self-deception. I can get myself all worked up and decide that something is right for me. Thus I'm ultimately thankful whenever God reins me in. I don't always appreciate it at the time, but I'm thankful in retrospect.

Case in point is my coming to St. Paul's ten years ago. Twelve years ago, you weren't on my radar screen. In fact, there was another church that I was very interested in.

Twelve years ago, I was one of two finalists to be rector of a wonderful Episcopal Church. It was a great congregation with a beautiful building. It was a pretty good fit for me and for my particular skills and gifts as a priest.

But I came in second. They called the other guy to be their rector. I've since become friends with that other priest. And while that particular congregation was a pretty good fit for me, it was an EXCELLENT fit for him and for his particular gifts.

At the time I really wanted that job. In retrospect, St. Thomas was a better fit for Fr. Ken. And two years later, St. Paul's-on-the-Plains was a MUCH better fit for me. But at the time, I didn't know that.

And that can be a very tough thing for us to deal with spiritually—when we don't get what we want. That kind of situation requires faith, which in the New Testament is also the word for trust. It requires us to trust in God, to lean into God more heavily. You can even say, "Lord, I'm not happy with this situation, but I have to trust in you."

Garth Brooks has a famous song titled, "Unanswered Prayers." The thesis of the song is that sometimes God doesn't answer your prayers, and that that's a good thing. I think Garth is basically correct but slightly off.

It's not that God leaves prayers unanswered. It's just that sometimes the answer is 'no.' Or sometimes the answer is 'wait.'

'Sometimes I thank God
When he says "no" to my prayers...'

Okay. That's not as good a song lyric for Garth. But it's probably a better statement theologically. Some of God's greatest gifts ARE prayers that are answered, 'no,' or 'wait.'

¹ very rough and brief summary of 2Sam 7:18-29

God says "no" to David. But it's also a "wait": 'You (David) won't build my Temple, but your son will.'

And what's more, God promises to build David a house. Not a physical house—David already has a nice palace. But a dynastic house. David is promised that his line will continue forever.

And again, this will later look like a broken promise. 400 years after David, his descendants will be captured and ousted from their throne by the Babylonians. At that point, it looks like David's dynasty ends.

And yet, almost 600 years after that, another descendant of David is born. He is not only a son of David. He is the Son of God. And his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. And of his reign there will be no end.

David would probably never have imagined or asked for this outcome. And yet through him, the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior of the World comes. That is infinitely more than David can ask for or imagine.

And we have to have that same level of trust. We have to trust in God's goodness. We have to trust in God's love. And we have to honestly be able to pray, "THY will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

That's not always an easy prayer to truly pray. Oftentimes we would prefer that "MY will be done." But we need to pray that God's will be done, even when it conflicts with our will. After all, God has our best interests at heart.

As our Patron Saint, St. Paul tells us,
"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."²

And that's a promise we can trust.

² 1Cor 2:9