

## **SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON**

### **Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**December 20, 2020**

**Psalm 89:1–5 (ESV); Psalm 89:8 (ESV); Psalm 89:19–29 (ESV):**

1 I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever;  
with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.  
2 For I said, “Steadfast love will be built up forever;  
in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness.”  
3 You have said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one;  
I have sworn to David my servant:  
4 ‘I will establish your offspring forever,  
and build your throne for all generations.’ ” Selah

**Psalm 89:8 (ESV):**

8 O LORD God of hosts,  
who is mighty as you are, O LORD,  
with your faithfulness all around you?  
5 Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,  
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!

**Psalm 89:19–29 (ESV):**

19 Of old you spoke in a vision to your godly one, and said:  
“I have granted help to one who is mighty;  
I have exalted one chosen from the people.  
20 I have found David, my servant;  
with my holy oil I have anointed him,  
21 so that my hand shall be established with him;  
my arm also shall strengthen him.  
22 The enemy shall not outwit him;  
the wicked shall not humble him.  
23 I will crush his foes before him  
and strike down those who hate him.

24 My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him,  
and in my name shall his horn be exalted.

25 I will set his hand on the sea  
and his right hand on the rivers.

26 He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,  
my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'

27 And I will make him the firstborn,  
the highest of the kings of the earth.

28 My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,  
and my covenant will stand firm for him.

29 I will establish his offspring forever  
and his throne as the days of the heavens.

**First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1–17 (ESV):**

**The Lord's Covenant with David**

7 Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, 2 the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." 3 And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you."

4 But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, 5 "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? 6 I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. 7 In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" ' 8 Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. 9 And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, 11 from the time that I appointed judges over

my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. <sup>12</sup>When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup>He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup>I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, <sup>15</sup>but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. <sup>16</sup>And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.' " <sup>17</sup>In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

#### **EPISTLE: Romans 16:25–27 (ESV):**

##### **Doxology**

25 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 26 but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— 27 to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

#### **THE GOSPEL - Luke 1:26–38 (ESV):**

##### **Birth of Jesus Foretold**

**26** In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, **27** to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. **28** And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" **29** But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. **30** And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. **31** And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, **33** and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

**34** And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

**35** And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. **36** And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. **37** For nothing will be impossible with God.” **38** And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

## **Sermon 49 – Fourth Sunday of Advent**

### **“Cedar House Rules”**

#### **2 Samuel 7:1-17**

Dear friends,

Our reading for this morning is an expanded edition of the Old Testament reading for this coming Sunday. There are a couple of verses added on at the end, verses that I feel are essential in getting to the meat of what God is promising David here. This is a promise that carries far more weight than what the history books tell us. I'll get into that in a sec, but this is very well placed for the Christmas season, and highlights the very center of what we celebrate here.

Some words on where we are here in Israelite history. This is a definite sweet spot for both David and Israel. David has just spent a good portion of his life running from the unhinged Saul, but now Saul is finally dead, and David is finally getting on with being the king that God anointed him to be in the first place. Jerusalem is conquered, David is in his nice big house, for once in Israel's history there aren't any enemies invading the land, and David the warlord, David the hero-king, David the general, looks around and finds himself without someone to fight for once in his life. With that, he finally starts thinking about his nice house in his capital city and comes to a somewhat logical conclusion, even if it's not the conclusion that

God comes to. Also keep in mind this is before the whole Bathsheba scandal. David hasn't done his big screwup yet, so this is a nice time to be alive.

**“Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, 'See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.' And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you.”** So David sees an understandable disconnect here. He's in his big old palace, God is in the tabernacle, which, do keep in mind, is essentially a fancy tent. The dwelling of nomad, a poor guy, a shepherd, like David used to be. It's a fair conclusion to come to, but it's based on some interesting assumptions, which God Himself will point out later. Nathan gets what David is on about, and he okays it without any fuss. But God steps in afterward.

**“But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, 'Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'"** First thing. Cedar is expensive. Cedar is royalty. You have to source that stuff from Lebanon, which is all foresty in these days, and the transport costs were astronomical. Second thing, God starts off with a question. He asks, David, why are you thinking of this? I'm not asking for it. There are assumptions behind David's question. In many instances they're good ones. But God reminds David that He doesn't care about furnishings, He doesn't care about houses, He doesn't care about the earthly trappings of

honor. God wants His people to be saved, to come to the knowledge of the truth. God wants people to take care of others, to be just, fair, to show mercy and consideration both. That's what God really cares about, not about temples made with hands. God sorta reminds David of this, then flips the scales on David in an awesome way.

God goes on for several verses, reminding David of all the blessings He has experienced at God's hand. He makes it clear that He will continue giving blessings in this vein, and but I want to zero you in on verse 11. This is where He turns this around on David. **“And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.”** Forget building a house for me, David. I'm gonna build *you* one.

This is the way our God likes to work. Please remember this is the same God who wrote the words “my ways are not your ways, my ways are higher than your ways, nor are my thoughts your thoughts.” God doesn't desire a give-and-take relationship with His people. God is not there for you as a business partner that you make contracts with. God does make covenants with His people, but they are decidedly one-sided. When God bargains with you, He doesn't ask for your firstborn, He doesn't ask for a life of holiness, He doesn't ask for your savings in the offering plate. He asks you to sit, listen, and receive the gifts He gives.

David starts to learn this again. God promises to build David a house, but He ain't talking about buildings. He's talking about a dynasty, something deeply important to a king to be sure, but more to the point, He's talking about a legacy. The dynasty of David will proceed for a long, long time, but that's not the true promise here. This dynasty will be distilled and sharpened to its finest point in Jesus Christ Himself. Do you see? God's not just promising David a son or heir, He's not

just promising Him a throne, He's promising Him that the King of the Universe, Messiah, God Himself, will come from David's bloodline and throne. Look at what He says. **“I will establish your kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”** God repeats that this kingdom is going to last forever several times as He finishes. If we take God literally here, which we should, we know that there is only one kingdom that lasts forever, the church, the kingdom of believers that Christ Himself came to establish on this earth.

So what's in here for us? Well, David finds himself in a good position, and he starts asking himself what He can do. That's a neat thing for David to do, sure, but God shows us just what kind of God He is in His response. God doesn't give you things with the expectation that you are going to kick back to Him in some way. He is God, He doesn't need anything from you. God gives you the free gift of salvation because He loves you and He wants you to survive the coming judgment, He wants to welcome you into His kingdom as His child. God provides not only Christ but all the ways that we receive Christ, we absorb these blessings.

Jesus was the culmination of God's greatest blessings, but He doesn't give these blessings expecting a response. We are not pagans, and our God is not in business. God is in the business of love, of blessing, He is the business of disciplining and shaping His children into what He wants them to be. He is free with His benefits, He wears His heart on His sleeve as He sends His Son to you, over and over again, to forgive you all the sins you daily commit. The devil would have us believe that God is a taker, He takes. He takes our loved ones in death. He takes our health as we age. He takes our time and our money and our faith and our effort and He never does anything with them. Look to David, dear brothers and sisters, and remember that God is a giver. He gives all good things in due season, and when He

takes, it's only so that He can give more fully. He gives forgiveness freely to all who ask for it. He gives without price and always according to that higher purpose. David tried to be the giver, and God understands what's behind that, but He gently reminds David. "David, that ain't your job. You're my warlord, not my builder. You're my child, and I will be the giver.

While we do not sit in palaces made of cedar, we enjoy many luxuries, and we have received many good things from God. Despite how long ago the Scriptures were written, we still find ourselves in many of the same places as our spiritual fathers. Christ shall be your giver, dear people. He has given you Himself on the cross to pay for your sins. He has given you the faith to receive this gift in the Baptismal font. He feeds you the fruits of His labor from the altar. He pours His words into your ear. The kingdom of David was established forever, and you are the heirs of that kingdom. He's given you that. Thanks Be to God.

Amen.