

We all want the best for our parents, for all those who love us (and for some who don't.) Have you noticed over the years that many young men and women who become very successful in their careers do something special for their parents? Often they build them a house. As you know, many young athletes who sign very large professional contracts – and often one of the first things they do is build a house for their parents – or parent. Many people who are not famous also have provided for their parents in a variety of ways – you and I both know some of them. We may even have done so as well.

King David had a house for himself and he wanted to build one for his Heavenly Parent.

Through all the long years of nomadic life in the desert, the Israelites had been able to provide a home – a spiritual house, for God. And because they were nomads, they made the House of God portable. The Israelites had a special tent, the Tabernacle, with an inner room, the Holy of Holies, and in it was placed the Ark of the Covenant containing, at the very least, the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. Some sources say that other artifacts were also in the ark – perhaps, a jar containing some of the manna with which God had fed them in the wilderness. Some say Aaron's staff.

Some documents from Old Testament history believe the Ark, which was a box or chest made of acacia, was highly ornate with precious metals. Others say it was very plain.

We do know that it was of utmost importance to the Israelites. Carried on two poles by chosen guards, the Ark of the Covenant preceded the people through the opening of the Red Sea and on the march of the army around the City of Jerecho. It is said that it still exists today, hidden in a church in Ethiopia, and guarded day and night.

When David was King, the Israelites had long been established in the Promised Land. Many had been able to construct permanent homes and, of course, this included King David. Now he wanted something permanent for God, the Father. And David wanted to build it!

The Old Testament reading this morning stated that God told the prophet Nathan that David would not be the one to build His temple. That job would go to David's offspring. And so, the project to give God a permanent spiritual home was later given to Solomon.

Solomon's temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and rebuilt about 30 years later. Jesus worshipped and taught at the second temple. That temple lasted until after Jesus' death and resurrection when it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

It is sometimes discussed by some Israelite descendants that a third temple might be built but the Temple Mount upon which the first two stood is now occupied by The Dome of the Rock, an important Islamic shrine.

In the New Testament, we are given an entirely different picture of what the spiritual home of God should be. Paul described it very well as he preached to the Ephesians. First, he was careful to explain to them that they were no longer "outsiders" that they were now one with the Jews in the worship of God.

Then he explained to them what that meant. He began in verse 20 by saying, "You believers are like a building that God owns." "Christ makes it grow and become a holy temple." That means that we are the building blocks of God's spiritual home, God's Holy Temple. We have a church, a building, – but we also have a temple within – it is us, it is God's people. And, in this spiritual building, Christ is the cornerstone.

Why else would he have said, “If you tear down the temple, I can rebuild it in three days.” Jesus knew that he was the cornerstone – and in three days, he was ready to resume the awesome task of building the church.

It is interesting to note that Jesus was also a descendent of the House of David. The gospel of Matthew traces his genealogy through Solomon by following Joseph’s line; while Luke traces it by following Mary’s line. Usually the Tree of Jesse (in art) shows Mary but not Joseph. Regardless, Jesus was a descendent of David, and he also built a temple.

Paul said, “You are being made into a place where God lives through the spirit.” What an awesome responsibility for us! But we are not alone in this responsibility. We have God’s help. We have each other and many whom we do not know but who are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul said that we are being “built together with them into God’s temple.”

My home church, Westminster of Rehoboth Beach, helped (with many others) in the construction of a church building for Rev, Innocent’s congregation in the African Country, Swaziland. They had a fairly large

church but they didn't have a building. It was easy to meet under the trees in the dry season – but the rainy season was a problem. They have a building now.

It always reminds me of the hymn “Bless Be the Tie That Binds”. I've always loved it – but now I can't sing it without feeling that I am in a small conference room in the city of Kananga in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It was July of 2006 – and although it was their winter, it was hot and humid. There were about 25 of us in the room: 10 from the United States and about 15 Elders and pastors of Kananga Presbytery. We were closing our partnership meeting on an ongoing agricultural project. After prayer, we joined hands to sing that wonderful hymn. Some were singing in French, some in Tshiluba, and some in English – and I remember thinking, “God understands each voice, each language and He knows that we all love Him – and each other!”

The tie that bound us then and continues to bind us now is nothing that can be seen. But we knew that it was there and that it held us tightly. Like most older hymns there is a lot of truth and a great deal of feeling in that one.

Something does bind us together as we join in our community of faith to serve as God's spiritual home, His church. Now there is an e-mail going around that tells us of a structure, newly found by scientists, that binds together all human and animal tissues within an individual. Maybe you received that e-mail about "laminin"? Don't worry, I looked it up. I'm an old biology teacher, you know.

Laminin is a glyco-protein that serves to bind cells and tissues together. According to one source. Laminin has three short "arms" and one long one. So guess what it looks like under a microscope – you're right, it looks just like a cross! I like the symbolism.

We are told that something binds us in Christian love – and we know that it is Christ that binds us. We are told that we are the temple, God's spiritual home. What responsibilities does that knowledge give us both as individuals and as a group? When we leave the church today, our responsibilities are not complete. And most of you don't stop there – I know that. You represent your God at church, at home, with family and friends, in the workplace, and in social situations – everywhere you go.

I have been welcomed into Congolese churches that were made of concrete and had half logs on the floor for pews. But I knew that I was in God's temple because God's temple surrounded me with smiles and words of welcome.

The Ark of the Covenant may have been taken by the Philistines; and the Babylonians and the Romans may have destroyed the temples on the Temple Mount – but the real strength of God has always lain in God's people. The ties that bind us as Christians are spiritual and mighty; they transcend gender and race and ethnicity. They are firm and unfettered by culture or creed. They are the ties that bind. Together we are God's temple. We are God's House, the temple within.

Thanks be to God!