

Fourth Sunday of Advent

TURNING FAVORS INTO FAVORITES

2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16

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Analysis by Mark Marius

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” ³Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.”

⁴But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I 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 and a tabernacle. ⁷Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?” ⁸Now 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 to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹and 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. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evil-doers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from 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. 16Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

DIAGNOSIS: One Favor Deserves Another

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *We Take God with Us*

We don't always trust where God is or how God operates. It seems that King David surmised that God shouldn't have to live like that—in a humble tent, moving about from place to place (v. 2). For those of us who occupy beautiful houses of cedar, and even concede that maybe God has something to do with it, our flesh tells us that we owe God. It is not right for us to live in luxury while God lives in a tent city. Shouldn't we ensure that God has an equally proper dwelling place. Instead of trusting in God's favor, David feels the need to do a favor for God. (Even in Advent we can get caught up in OUR actions of keeping a holy advent instead of waiting and watching how God chooses to act.)

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Diagnosis) : *We Show God Favor*

We must do more for God. We must build God a house worthy of God's majesty and might (v. 4). We must provide protection for God and give him the glory that only we can give him. Power and blessings can easily go to our head. And it often is reflected on our doing rather than the God who gave it to us. Even with God reminding us that God's power makes a home in the small, weak and vulnerable (v. 8), we have a hard time reconciling this. So we attempt to build a throne for God that is equal to the throne God has given us. And before you know it ... God is

institutionalized. And once that happens—watch out, the throne will have problems. (Think here of glorious nativity sets for all the world to see with or without that baby yet. Does God really need us to do this in order for it to be Advent or Christmas?)

Step 3: Advanced Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *God Does Not Need Our Help*

God reminds us that we are nothing without him. God made us, like God made David (vv. 8, 9). God's favor finds us when we were small, weak and vulnerable. But how soon we forget. When we have power we want to use that on God. But David is remembered as a great king, not because of anything David did on his own, but because God promised to make it so. When we reject the way that God chooses to work in this world; among the weak, and powerless, we will feel the power of God working against us, and we end up becoming nothing once more. And it's not so much our enemies we have to fear as it is our God. Just ask Uzzah in 2 Sam. 6:6-8. Oh wait—you can't. God killed him for "only trying to help." (The more we try and make Christmas happen the more we cut ourselves off from the God that brings it to us.)

PROGNOSIS: God Plays Favorites

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *God Helps Those Who Can't Help Themselves*

God comes to us in our helpless state and delivers us. For David that was as a lowly shepherd. And God's favor established David as a mighty king whose throne will last forever (v. 16). However, the palace and army weren't part of the deal because history shows us that God's favor continues to be given through vulnerable means. We only have to turn to today's Gospel (Luke 1:26-38) to see God choosing to take up residence in the weak and vulnerable virgin Mary. God once again chooses to mingle with our sinful nature by becoming one of us. God's desire is

not to be enthroned but to be as close to the people and experience all that we experience (v. 6), including death. And so in the most unlikely scenarios, God established his throne forever through giving up all power and dying on the cross. It was quite sometime after David for this favor to be realized, but the promise was given and could be trusted (v. 16). (Regardless of our Advent or Christmas rituals—Christ comes to us.)

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *God Shows Favor*

So God shares all that God has with us by dwelling with us (vv. 6, 7). Through our baptism God has taken up residence with us. We become the temple of Christ. Through Holy Communion Christ mingles his body and blood with our beings, and this is where Jesus is happy to live. And God never once asks why can't our bodies be better than they are (v. 7). When we dare to be vulnerable and weak we have God's power working mightily in us. (Christmas is not our actions toward God but God's actions toward us.)

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *God Takes Us into the World*

The Holy Spirit like the Ark of the Covenant is now leading us and taking us to all peoples. As David trusted that God favored him the kingdom expanded. We do not keep to ourselves in palaces, or temples, or houses of cedar. Instead we go out in the world to share God's blessings with others. We do not seek to be powerful but vulnerable. To meet people in pain and suffering and let them know that God is with us. We face those that would do us harm, not in battle, but accompanied by the very God that has already defeated our enemies and have given us rest (v. 11). (Christmas isn't just for our homes but for proclaiming and discovering Christ out in the world.)