

9.25.22 – Pentecost 16
“God’s Ordinary Temple”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

1 Kings 7:13-22 (NLT) ~ Pam

¹³ King Solomon then asked for a man named Hiram to come from Tyre. ¹⁴ He was half Israelite, since his mother was a widow from the tribe of Naphtali, and his father had been a craftsman in bronze from Tyre. Hiram was extremely skillful and talented in any work in bronze, and he came to do all the metal work for King Solomon.

¹⁵ Hiram cast two bronze pillars, each 27 feet tall and 18 feet in circumference. ¹⁶ For the tops of the pillars he cast bronze capitals, each 7 1/2 feet tall. ¹⁷ Each capital was decorated with seven sets of latticework and interwoven chains. ¹⁸ He also encircled the latticework with two rows of pomegranates to decorate the capitals over the pillars. ¹⁹ The capitals on the columns inside the entry room were shaped like water lilies, and they were six feet tall. ²⁰ The capitals on the two pillars had 200 pomegranates in two rows around them, beside the rounded surface next to the latticework. ²¹ Hiram set the pillars at the entrance of the Temple, one toward the south and one toward the north. He named the one on the south Jakin, and the one on the north Boaz. ²² The capitals on the pillars were shaped like water lilies. And so the work on the pillars was finished

Ezra 5:11-16 (NLT)

¹¹ “This was their answer: ‘We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the Temple that was built here many years ago by a great king of Israel. ¹² But because our ancestors angered the God of heaven, he abandoned them to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who destroyed this Temple and exiled the people to Babylonia. ¹³ However, King Cyrus of Babylon, during the first year of his reign, issued a decree that the Temple of God should be rebuilt. ¹⁴ King Cyrus returned the gold and silver cups that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple of God in Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of Babylon. These cups were taken from that temple and presented to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom King Cyrus appointed as governor of Judah. ¹⁵ The king instructed him to return the cups to their place in Jerusalem and to rebuild the Temple of God there on its original site. ¹⁶ So this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the Temple of God in Jerusalem. The people have been working on it ever since, though it is not yet completed.’

L: These are Historic Words of God’s People. C: Thanks be to God!

Haggai 2:3-9 (NIV) ~ Pam

³ ‘Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?’ ⁴ But now be strong, Zerubbabel,’ declares the Lord. ‘Be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the Lord, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the Lord Almighty. ⁵ ‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’

⁶ “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty. ⁸ ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the Lord Almighty. ⁹ ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the Lord Almighty.”

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (NRSVue)

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Leader: These are Clarifying Words of God.

People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Creator God, we thank you for our rich Bible history and the people you love who honored you in these centuries of rebuilding. Help us to apply their lessons to our world today. We are grateful to be together in worship; and please be with those who could not be here today. Illumine our minds and hearts this fall as we learn to see the extraordinary in the ordinary. Speak through this messenger and your words. Amen.

It’s officially autumn! Can’t you feel it? Of course, there will be hotter days to come before the heat goes on, so please start wearing layers and help yourselves to the blankets and shawls as needed.

If you’ve read your bulletin, you may have noticed a little something different today – we have more Scriptures, yes, but at the end of the last hymn, we will walk together to the stained-glass exit and stop on the sidewalk for our tree blessing and benediction. It will only take a minute or two, and we do have a few folding chairs set up for you. We will not go down the steps, just stay close to the door; you may have heard already that we will be removing the dangerous declining oak tree on Monday. It is then appropriate we’ll be talking about the beauty and meaning of God’s temple today.

On the first Sunday this month, we studied God's promise and warning to Solomon from 2 Chronicles 7; it was about the temple he was building: "He promised to own this house for a house of sacrifice to Israel and a house of prayer for all people: My name shall be there forever (2 Chron. 7:12, 16), that is, 'There will I make myself known, and there will I be called upon.' (Matthew Henry commentary)." This is one of the two temples we read about today in 1 Kings. This is the temple, built in 957 BC that David had dreamed of building before his death; he had gathered many resources and materials, so Solomon finished preparations and began the building in his 4th year of ruling. It took 7 years to build the temple. Go to 1 Kings, chapter 6 and 7 to read more. It had only 2,700 square feet of floor space in the main chapel area. That is considered a medium-large house by today's standards. Its walls were made of Lebanese cedar covered in gold with sculptures of angels and cherubim, palm trees, and flowers.

After the temple, Solomon built the palace of 11,250 square feet with the same cedar walls and rich decor. The palace might be thought of as an Administration building, not just a residence. There was a colonnade of pillars, a front portico (you may have heard the term Solomon's Porch before), a throne room, a Hall of Justice, and an armory. The designer was Hiram who, as a child, received training in working with bronze, gold, silver, iron, stone, wood, ribbon and linen. He became a master craftsman and metalsmith with experience in all kinds of engraving decoration. As you heard in the Scripture, he cast two huge bronze pillars, each 27 feet high and 18 feet wide. With the capitals on top, they were over 34 feet tall (1.5 stories high) or half the size of the

columns at the National Building Museum (the old Pension Building in DC)! This was common for pillars to be placed on either side of a temple portico as a dramatic entrance. The south side's pillar was called Jakin, meaning "Yahweh establishes", and the north side's pillar was called Boaz, meaning "in Him (Yahweh) is strength." A few scholars thought the two pillars represented male and female, but most agree they represented two geographic mountains to pass through to get to God.

For us, these images like the one on the bulletin cover were ostentatious, but to the people of Solomon's day, it was an ordinary building project. The pomegranates on the capitals represented fertility, and there were brass bowls, gold cups, candlesticks, lampstands, and other embellishments meant to show respect to God who provides. Many of the pagan temples had similar furnishings, so it seemed ordinary to many, but to Solomon and Hiram, both filled with wisdom, understanding, and skill, the result they desired was an extraordinary tribute to Yahweh.

In 587 BC, Solomon's temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, and the people became exiles as God warned. The second passage in Ezra details how Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple at the same location, starting in 515 BC. Due to foreign opposition and local apathy, the temple sat unfinished for 17 years; there was no roof! Then God sent prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage and support Zerubbabel to finish the temple. After the first two years building the foundation and 17 years of abandonment, it only took four more years to complete it; however, it was not as grand as Solomon's, yet was symbolically glorified in Christ's arrival, and in us, His temple. If you like Biblical history, descriptive

language, and a new understanding of God's work even among pagans, please read the Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Haggai, and Zechariah to understand the temple restoration. You will not be disappointed. There were masons, carpenters, priests, singers, gatekeepers, temple servants and those who gave "freewill offerings (Ezra 2:68)" to help build the temple, some say over 10,000 people. Thanks to King Cyrus, God blessed the project and the King of Persia, Darius, who was an aggressive ruler from 522-486, funded the whole thing, among other building projects. Who says God can't use extraordinary measures through unbelievers to accomplish HIS goals!

When the temple had been abandoned, it was both discouraging and symbolic of poor economic conditions, until Haggai (see that passage) reminded the people that as they restored and refreshed the physical temple, it would become a visible representation of God's mercy and grace. And so, it did. I believe there are parallels to our own church building and grounds. People complained that Solomon's day was grander, as I'm sure your memories of this building and church, or Boulevard's are grander than what we see today; however, memories are faulty. The past is but a memory; we are here now, today! We can influence our community by showing what God is doing here both physically and spiritually **if** we stay encouraged and remember that we do not worship this temple; it is but a tool for God to make himself known through the people here and the community of believers we built and are continuing to build.

Paul, in the First Corinthians passage uses the Temple as a metaphor because it fit in better with their culturally pagan beliefs. The temple was

still standing and active, so Paul transfers the meaning of that image to the community and the sacred places they met and worshiped God. This is the key point **for us**: the temple exists wherever the Holy Spirit of God dwells. That may be in an action, a community, or with individuals. This type of temple seems ordinary; vision, direction, unity and harmony are necessary to build any structure or community that can withstand evil intent. The character, resources, and strength God gave to Solomon is provided to us too if we accept them and act in service, humility, and obedience to God. Are we being the best stewards of our first temple? Shall we restore it and ourselves to carry on the mission God has given us? Yes, I say, we **are**, and we will continue little by little to restore our spiritual and physical foundations to beauty and purpose, as directed by God. *Let us see the extraordinary possibilities for this ordinary building and for our ordinary selves.* A phrase used in marriage ceremonies says it best, so let us pledge to one another that “What God has put together let no man put asunder.” Amen? Amen! ||

Will you pray with me? Lord, thank you for this encouragement in a season of economic and political stress. Let us remember that you are in charge, and we are commanded to work with zeal, our resources, and energy to restore your legacy. Help us to be humble and willing as we recognize your Holy Spirit within our community of believers and non-believers – you can do all things! Let us bring our best quality, wisdom, character, and beauty into this place as we shine your love and light into Annandale and beyond. In Jesus’ name we pray, **Amen.**

Tree Blessing & Benediction ~

Let us pray:

As we gather here on the terrace of The United Baptist Church, looking at the venerable oak tree that has served us, workers, local birds, insects, squirrels, and the community so well for many years, we see and mourn its decline and we thank you for the clarity of next steps. We thank you for its years of growth and shelter. We give **you** our gratitude that no one has ever been hurt by its dying branches and we release its life energy back into the ground for renewal.

Lord, we ask you to keep the workers coming on Monday safe during this dangerous but necessary removal action. Please keep our building and neighbors safe during the process. Relocate the critters as you see fit. And Lord, thank you for the motivation to plant a new tree in the future so we may watch it grow and mature, as our church thrives forward. Now as we leave this place, go with each of us to share your love and light with others. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.