

Pastor T.C. Arnold
1st Sunday after Epiphany
1 Kings 8:6-13
January 10th, 2016

“When it’s convenient!” How many times have you put off an important project at home, an errand that needs to be done, or even something like a vacation because it’s not convenient? Happens to us all the time. We would much rather do anything, “when it is convenient.”

Convenience, however, had nothing to do with the Old Testament text for today – but some may make that mistake. A little history reminder might be in order. The Ark of the Covenant (The golden box with the Ten Commandments in it) had been residing in a tent for many, many years. Even though the people of Israel had occupied the Promised Land for a fairly long time by this point, a permanent place for the Ark to reside had not been constructed. When Solomon became king after David, he spent seven years constructing the Temple and then thirteen more years constructing the King’s palace. Only after both were constructed did they dedicate the Temple and bring the Ark to the Most Holy Place specially prepared for this most sacred relic. One could look at this text and think that they only brought the Ark inside “when it was convenient” because it sat out in a tent for 13 years after the Temple was constructed. But that would not be true.

You see, Solomon not only waited until all the construction was complete, he waited another eleven months until the “seventh month” called “Ethanym” because this was the Feast of Tabernacles celebrated by the people of Israel. He waited for the right time to bring the Ark of the Covenant into God’s Holy Temple. It wasn’t a matter of convenience – it was a matter of timing.

And here’s another matter of timing in our text. It says that, “*After the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the Temple of the Lord.*” The Lord came to His Temple at just the right time – His time. He revealed Himself in this dark cloud in the Most Holy Place. The Priests couldn’t even stand inside because the Lord “overwhelmed” the place that was built especially for Him. The presence of God was made known. The Lord was seen. On Wednesday (Epiphany) we heard about a star above where Jesus was and the Magi finding their way by that star and giving gifts to the King of kings. This week, continuing the theme of Epiphany (appearing), the Lord reveals Himself in another way – this time (in the text) hundreds of years before the Magi would come looking for Jesus.

Also, this “appearing” theme might be a good one to stick with today. The reason: God still “appears” to His people. God still “reveals” Himself to those He loves – and we are included in those He loves. Sometimes we might think that God only “appears” or is “revealed” or “makes Himself known” or “intervenes” on this side of eternity when it’s *convenient*. Not true!

Part of our feelings about God and His presence among us is based on what we experience in life. When bad times are upon us, we often think God is not with us – or He doesn’t care – or He is trying to hurt us or get back at us for something. To jump to these kinds of conclusions is “convenient” because it makes sense. If I’m suffering, God must not care. That’s a convenient conclusion. We might think suffering in life “equals” God does not care or God cannot do anything about it. That’s wrong.

The only explanation that we can give to suffering and the hardships that we encounter is sin. And sin is not God’s fault. Sin is our own fault. Sin is the condition that we are born with and the tendency that we lean toward because we – by our very nature – are self-serving, self-consumed people. We think things we shouldn’t – and then we act on those things not even considering the consequences. That’s the way we are. And that hurts us and the people around us. We are the perpetrators of hurtful harmful things to ourselves and others. The answer given for the question of how to prevent such hurt and suffering – stop it and stop it now. Whatever you are doing – stop it. Do whatever it takes to stop it.

But what about those situations which seem out of our control? You know getting ill unexpectedly. An accident that just happens out of the blue. Or, something like all the flooding destroying homes, businesses and even taking lives. All of a sudden, something horrible takes place and it

causes us great suffering and we didn't do anything. It just happened. Then, where is God? Why is He silent? Why does He not just intervene and take away our pain?

Here's the answer: I don't know. I don't understand God's plans and why He allows in our lives what we go through. I honestly don't understand. And the reason I don't understand and the reason that nobody understands is because God does things His own way on His own time. He does not do things "when it's convenient" for us. God has the foreknowledge to know how things are going to work out for us. That's something we don't have or understand. God knows all of our hardships and faults ahead of time. God knows what we are going through and what we will go through ahead of time. He knows and waits for the perfect time. Maybe not for us, maybe not for someone we know, but the perfect time for Him and that just may not be "convenient" for you.

Solomon built the Temple in seven years. It was finished but the Ark of the Covenant, the most holy relic of all, sat outside in a tent. He took another thirteen years to build his palace. Still the Ark waited. And then, it was probably another eleven months or so – waiting for the Feast of Tabernacles – before the dedication of the Temple took place the Ark was set into place. Solomon waited for the right time – not a day sooner and not a day later.

There has always been "speculation" regarding Solomon waiting so long to bring the Ark of the Covenant into the Temple. Even though the palace is separate from the Temple, Solomon seemed to somehow link the two together. Perhaps it is for that reason Solomon waited. He wanted construction to be complete before the Lord's Ark made its way into the house built for Him. He wanted both places complete because Solomon saw the Temple and the Palace as belonging to the Lord. Both places are linked to God. Therefore, Solomon wanted both places to be finished.

Not only was there a place to worship and honor God that was built – the Temple. There was also a place constructed from where God would use His servant Solomon to rule – the palace. God's "Godly" rule from the Temple and God's "Kingly" rule from the palace. God would appear before His people and a place was now established where the people could go and the people could see. This is the place that the Lord was at. This is the place where the people could see God.

They saw God in cloud of smoke in the Temple – that "holy smoke." He appeared before His people making His presence known. And He does the same when Jesus was born in a manger – made manifest before the people. Their eyes could see God in this small child who was worshiped by shepherds and men from faraway places. God's light shined in Jesus as He made His Epiphany – His appearance among the nations.

And today, God comes to this Holy place. Every day He comes. Every day He comes into our lives with this message of hope and gift of salvation. He doesn't wait to give you life. That's a gift for today and every day. Even though we are a "when it's convenient" type of people – God is not. It's always the right time and that time is now – to serve the Lord and to receive His most precious gifts. The time is now that God delivers you from all unrighteousness.

Yes, when it comes to suffering – we don't know how much longer we will have to "wait." But God knows – and He knows His plans for you. Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us, "*I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you, not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.*" That's what God knows. He knows plans. And He has plans for you. Don't worry it will be at the most convenient time – right on time – God's time for you. Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.