

AN ETERNAL HOUSE

The American poet Edgar Guest once wrote a line of poetry that's become a staple of folk wisdom: *"It takes a heap of livin' to make a house a home."*

It may not be up there with Shakespeare, but it's not bad and we can all identify with the thought.

Psychologists tell us that the house we live in as children can play an important part in our adult dreams.

I know it's true of me: I've had a lot of dreams over the years that involve my childhood home.

Apparently it has a special place in my mind as well as my heart.

The ancient Israelites had a special house that God dwelt in when he came to be among them.

It was called the tabernacle, the "tent of meeting" and it had been constructed according to detailed instructions which God had given to Moses.

The tabernacle was ornate, beautiful, and portable: the Israelites carried it with them during the entire forty years they spent journeying through the wilderness of Sinai.

Every Sabbath, they set up the tabernacle and gathered for worship.

As they worshipped, Yahweh would come down and fill the sanctuary with His presence—the smoke and fire which were called his *cavod*, His glory.

And when the Israelites moved, Yahweh moved with them: leading them by his *cavod*: smoke by day and fire by night.

He took care of them and protected them as he led them through the wilderness toward their destination.

He fed them every day with bread from heaven called manna.

He led them to springs of water.

He gave them laws to live by and a form of worship through which they would be forgiven when they broke His laws.

He swept their enemies out of their way and at the end of their journey gave them a land of their own—a land of milk and honey.

When the Israelites entered their new homeland they brought the tabernacle with them and worshipped there every Sabbath.

Later, when their king David had built Israel into a small empire, he wanted to replace the tabernacle with a stationary house—a temple for God to dwell in.

But God had a different plan.

He said to David, *“Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?”* “No,” said the Lord: *“I will build a house for you—an eternal house with an eternal throne....”*

Then God appointed David’s son, Solomon, to build the temple.

And the temple Solomon built was a majestic structure indeed.

But as splendid as Solomon’s temple was, it wasn’t the eternal temple God had in mind.

God made that clear when four hundred years later he spoke through the prophet Jeremiah: *“...What I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your fathers.”*

God would allow the temple in Jerusalem to be destroyed.

And so it came to pass.

God knew that the Israelites would mis-use His temple.

They would fill it with idols and use it to worship pagan gods instead of Yahweh.

So he abandoned the temple and allowed Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to destroy it and take the Israelites into captivity.

After the Jews were allowed to return to their homeland, King Herod built a temple which was even larger and more majestic than Solomon's temple.

And once again the Jews placed their hopes and confidence in their temple, as we read in the *Gospel of Mark*: *"As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!' "* But Jesus responded, *"Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."*

And once again it came to pass.

Forty years later, the Romans came and pulled down the temple stone by stone and cast them down into the Kidron Valley.

The temple has never been rebuilt.

On the mount where it had stood there now stands a pagan temple called the Dome of the Rock.

God was not referring to Solomon's temple or Herod's temple when he promised David: "The Lord will build a house for you—an eternal house with an eternal throne...."

Then to what house was God referring?

The answer is in our Gospel lesson for today,

After Jesus had cleansed the temple of merchants and moneychangers, the Jews challenged him: "*What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do these things!*"

And Jesus replied, "*Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.*"

And they responded, "*But it has taken us forty years to build this temple! And you are going to raise it up in three days?*"

They had a point.

But then, John tells us, "*The temple he had spoken of was his body.*"

So the real house to which God had been referring when he said to David, "The Lord Himself will build a

house for you—an eternal house which will contain an eternal throne”—that house was not a temple made of gold and silver and wood and marble,

Jesus would be the eternal house in which God would be enthroned among His people.

Jesus would be the temple which would be filled with the glory of the Lord.

Jesus would be the sacrifice which would take away the sins of the world.

Jesus would be the king who would reign eternally on an eternal throne.

Jesus would be the mountain to which people all over the world would stream in order to be cleansed of their sins and receive eternal life.

Isn't that just like God?

We try to do something good for Him and he does something far greater for us.

We build cathedrals to glorify Him and He sends His Son to glorify us.

Our home—our eternal home—is not the house or condo we own or the apartment we rent.

Our church is not the building in which we worship.

Both of these serve us well for the time being but the time will come when we won't need them at all.

Our real home, our eternal home, is in Christ.

And how do we live in Christ—our new temple?

First, by inviting Him to live in us and to make His home in our hearts.

By trusting Him to lead us and defend us against our enemies as He did for the ancient Israelites as they wandered through the wilderness.

By allowing His Spirit fill us and permeate our bodies and souls like the smoke and fire of His glory filled the tabernacle in the wilderness.

By bearing in mind as we toil and sweat for our daily bread that it is God who provides the bread and who gave us our bodies.

By asking Him to show us our sins and lead us to repentance and help us grow in faith.

By praying that He will gradually create in us the greatest gift of all: the mind of Christ.

We live in Christ by being part of the Body of Christ on earth—His Church.

It's not a body of stone and metal and wood, but a body—a communion—of saints who are all those who believe that their sins are forgiven through his blood sacrifice and who by faith possess His righteousness.

In other words, all who are saved by grace through faith.

Luther was once asked to give a definition of the church.

“The church,” he said, “is simply sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd.”

The Church is the fellowship of those who confess with their lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that God raised Him from the dead.

We are the body of Christ and the temples of His Spirit; we live in Him and He lives in us.

He gives us our daily bread and forgives our daily sins.

He leads us away from temptation and He delivers us from all evil.

Through His Word and His sacraments, through prayer and fellowship, through our witness to our faith in words and works, we live out His commission to “go and make disciples of all nations.”

He makes our body his temple and we make His body our temple.

What are we apart from God?

Words like “empty” and “dark” and “lifeless” come to mind.

The Psalmist wrote: *“Each man’s life is but a breath; [he] is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: he bustles about, but only in vain...”* *“Like the grass, [he] will soon wither...”*

It has been estimated that the entire human body, reduced to the elements that constitute it, would be worth about three or four dollars.

We’re not made of precious elements like gold or silver or platinum; we’re made of common elements like carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen and iron.

The name “Adam” was a simple noun that meant “clay” or “dirt.”

That’s what God made us out of.

But then He breathed life into us, and as long as we remain connected to Him through faith in His Son Jesus, we have life.

As long as we live in Him and He lives in us, we will live forever.

But just as physical nature abhors a vacuum, so does our spiritual nature.

Our spirits will be filled with one thing or another.

They can be filled with the spirit of this world and what it has to offer or they can be filled with the Spirit of God.

Those who set their hopes for happiness upon what the world has to offer are building their house on sand, and when the rain comes and the rivers rise and the wind begins to howl, their house will fall.

But those who set their hopes upon what God has promised are building their house on the Rock of Ages and when the rain comes and the rivers rise and the wind begins to howl, their house will stand firm and they will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Amen.

