

ADVENT 4, December 24th, 2017

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

WE have some pretty crazy ideas about what it means to be God's people and so every now and then, we have an account of an ongoing conversation about what it means to be human beings who are in relationship with something of cosmic proportions, some force in the universe that is good and is somehow or other, a part of our human being-ness.

With a little imagination, we can remember the first conversation between Moses and God.

I'm not talking about the burning bush part.

I'm not talking about Moses taking off his shoes in deference to God's presence—talk about total vulnerability—there are scorpions and snakes and spiders and nasty things in the desert.

I'm not even talking about the bargaining Moses does with God that gets his brother Aaron to lend a hand.

I'm talking about the part where Moses poses the question: "tell me your name. Who, shall I tell the people, is speaking to us?"

God doesn't say: well, I'm Jehovah, or Elohim, or the Rock of Ages, or Yahweh. God just says: I am who I am. If the people ask, just tell them I AM sent you.

Guess God doesn't want to be pinned down with a name.

The conversation goes from there:

Eventually, the people get pretty secure with themselves and think that God should give them a king. Having wise leaders, they were called judges, to guide their community isn't flashy enough. They want to be more like the other tribes in the neighborhood.

I AM says, you don't need a king. You've got me. I AM also takes the hands off approach—he didn't make puppets, he made humans.

You know that Yiddish saying: We make plans, God laughs.

The Kingdom thing hasn't ever worked out to well.

And now, today, in 1st Samuel, another human folly. David, the most famous of all the kings has a bright idea, he wants to build a temple to honor God.

Who knows if I AM was appalled or amused by the idea,

but I AM says, since when do I want a temple?

The temple is built anyway. It lasts about 1000 years but it is gone now. Temples really aren't made to hold God,

just like it isn't kingdoms that gives God power.

I AM is pretty clear—I AM can't be pinned down. Build a container, a kingdom or a temple with human hands, and it will never be enough.

As the hymn goes,

tower and temple turn to dust, but God's power, hour by hour,

is my temple and my tower.

And then, I AM being I AM, there is new plan.

A kingdom for God, a temple for God, but NOT built with human hands.

It is built, oddly enough, in a land that is under Roman occupation. The worst of times for the Jewish people. About as far as you can get from being your own kingdom.

It begins, surprisingly,

not when a great king has a bright idea, but when a young peasant girl says yes. With all the limited power accorded to her by her gender, her age, her economic status, which isn't much at all, she says yes.

In her life, within her own body, the temple can be built.

But she doesn't do it alone—in fact she probably couldn't do it alone. Young pregnant women without a husband can get stoned back then. Joseph first steps in to spare her a public punishment, but then he too says yes. He will join Mary in this grand venture God has planned.

His kindness and his courage are part of the story too.

And so it begins.

The birth of a temple, but not a temple like anyone had ever imagined.

The building of a kingdom, but not a kingdom that is conceived by human imagination.

This is kind of a dicey time for the human race.

Some are certain that if certain leaders are in charge, things will go better for our country and the world.

Others are equally sure that if those same leaders are in charge, we are going to hell in a handbasket—and they don't just mean global warming.

But I AM has already been pretty clear: I AM doesn't need a particular political system to act powerfully. What I AM needs is human hearts to inhabit.

I AM has been pretty clear: I AM doesn't need fancy temples, or churches, or even beautiful hymns sung by beautiful voices to be honored.

All that is nice and good, and we suspect I AM is immensely touched by our devotion, but what I AM desires, most of all,

is lives that are built to serve the higher purpose Jesus named.

Simply to love and honor and respect each other.

We make plans, God laughs. God doesn't need, or even want, Kingdom's made with human will or temples built with human hands.

What God wants is for us to be more like Mary,

who had no power whatsoever, except the power to say yes.

What God wants is the simple dignity of Joseph, who agreed that God's plan was worth following.

It is the only way God has to be at home in the world,

through us.

And on it, on our yes that is what Mary gives

and our ability to imagine, as Joseph did,

that something bigger was up than an out of wedlock pregnancy,

that is all I AM needs, to make his home within us, and among us.

In fact, maybe it is the only way the kingdom, and the temple, get built.