

The Right Face Can Do a Lot for a Dismal Place

By Larry Augsburg

2 Samuel 7:1-17

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- I. Ninety-eight years ago, in 1910, my great-grandfather, Elisha Thompson, a grizzled, crusty, cantankerous old Civil War veteran—he's from the Methodist side of my family—was facing a crisis on his farm on County Trunk G a mile west of Seymour, Wisconsin.
 - A. There were only four of them left there on the farm anymore—Great Grandpa and Grandma Thompson, daughter Lora, and son Harry, who did the farming.
 - B. The problem was that Lora was getting married and leaving home.
 - C. Now the reason that was a crisis was that Great Grandma Thompson was blind.
 1. She had been blind from cataracts since before Harry was born, and for years had not been able to do the work required of a Wisconsin farm wife.
 - a. The daughters had had to fill in for Mom all these years.
 - b. And now, with the last daughter getting married, there would be no one to do the cooking and cleaning and laundry, and gardening and canning and dairy and eggs.
 2. A woman had to be found to come and join the operation.
 - D. So in desperation Great-Grandpa Thompson wrote to another daughter, Stella, my grandmother, and asked if she would move home to help out.
 1. Now I suspect there was a reason Elisha chose Stella as the one to invite to move home, namely that out of all his children she was the sweetest and most likely to be able to make such an arrangement work.
 2. But for Stella to return to the farm would be a major challenge for several reasons.
 - a. The most obvious, of course, was that Stella was married and had a husband and two children—one just a newborn.
 - (1) Her husband would have to quit his job at a lumbermill in northwest Wisconsin for them to move to the farm.
 - (2) But there was no place in the farm operation for him.
 - (3) He would have to find his own job.
 - b. Second was the issue that Stella would become basically a live-in servant putting up with her mother, who was a headstrong woman.
 - (1) Blindness had not dulled her active mind or sharp tongue.
 - (2) As an example of what Sarah Thompson was capable of—the farm was in her name because of some legal trouble Elisha had had, and when she died it was discovered that she had secretly drawn up a will in which she left the farm to Harry and a one dollar bill to her husband.
 - (a) Now I know a dollar was worth a lot more then.
 - (b) But I think the point was obvious.
 - c. And then, of course, there was cantankerous old Elisha himself.
 - d. Between Elisha and Sarah and Harry and the general dysfunction in

that farm there on Country Trunk G west of Seymour, there were lots of reasons why Stella should not move home.

3. But Stella did move home.
 - a. She put up with a lot just to come.
 - b. And then Art and Stella put up with a lot once they got there.
 4. But my grandmother, a gracious, loving person with a reputation for great hospitality, became the center around which that whole operation revolved for the next 49 years until she died in a hospital bed in the farmhouse living room attended by four daughters and daughters-in-law in January, 1959.
 5. Stella became the indwelling face of the Thompson homestead which she and Grandpa transformed into the Kollath family home.
 - a. That included having to buy the farm from Harry at full market price and having to buy the equipment at auction.
 - b. Together they turned that fairly dysfunctional farm into a functional, happy place about which I have very fond and vivid memories.
- E. An indwelling presence, a pleasant, kind, happy indwelling face, can do a lot for a pretty dismal place.
- II. And that is exactly what we see in our scripture from 2 Samuel this morning.
- A. Now to understand this passage you have to realize that the way Israel believed God dwelt in their midst was:
1. That God was enthroned between the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant.
 2. And that wherever the ark was, that was the dwelling place of God.
 3. And that's where you went to meet with him and to worship him.
- B. Just prior to the passage we read this morning, David had brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem and had placed it in a tent he had pitched for it.
1. This was actually a political move more than a religious move because by doing this David was consolidating his power in Jerusalem which he was establishing as the capital of the combined tribes of Israel.
 - a. Israel was a pretty dysfunctional place during this time in history.
 - b. There was no unity among the twelve tribes. They bickered and fought with each other. They needed to be united in some way.
 - c. And that's what David was in the process of attempting to do.
 2. God would now be defined as indwelling David's capital city, and all Israelites, including some not particularly loyal to David, would be forced to come to his city to worship God.
- C. But, having achieved that, David *realized he needed to do more, both for power's sake and also out of respect for God, which we see in his comment from v. 2 – "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."*
- D. (And so the prophet) *Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you." In other words, Nathan was telling David, "Yes, go ahead. Build the temple you have in*

mind.”

- E. But later that night the word of God came to Nathan to tell David, “I’m doing okay. I don’t necessarily need a house of cedar.”
 - F. “In fact what’s going to happen is that I’m going to dwell in the midst of my people in a different way from the ark of the covenant in a tent or a temple. I’m going to dwell in my people through you and your descendants.”
 - 1. *I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you.*
 - 2. And in v.16 he says, Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.
 - G. What the Lord God is saying to David is “You will be my chosen one leading Israel. You will be my face dwelling in the midst of the people.”
 - 1. I need someone of flesh, a human presence among my people.
 - 2. And you and your household are that indwelling presence.
 - 3. This passage is the foundation of the importance of that line that all of us likely memorized at one time, “for he was of the house and line of David.”
 - a. The house and line of David was the great unifying feature in Israel.
 - b. The house and line of David was the indwelling face of God in the dismal history of a fractious and dysfunctional people.
 - H. Now just two generations later, the northern kingdom of Israel would rush back into the dysfunction and reject the house of David, but the southern kingdom of Judah would struggle for generation after generation to maintain the line of David.
 - 1. But after Judah was hauled into captivity in Babylon, that effort dissolved, and for over 500 years no one worried about how the face of God indwelt his people, the fractious, dysfunctional Jews, in the form of a son of David.
 - 2. There was some sort of a hope that eventually a Davidic dynasty would be reestablished, but no one know how or when any such thing would happen.
- III. The first evidence of something new happening along the line of God dwelling among his people through the family of David shows up in Luke 1.
- A. *God sent the angel Gabriel to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The angel said, “You will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”*
 - 1. We see the indwelling face of God in this passage in two senses.

- a. First, God was going to once again indwell his people through a descendent of David.
 - (1) This is the fulfillment of what he said back in 2 Samuel 7 and in other passages in the OT.
 - (2) God was going to reinstate the line of David to its rightful place.
 - b. But even more, God was going to indwell Mary to make it happen.
 - (1) This would be a literal physical indwelling of a fetus.
 - (2) *God would begin his new indwelling of his people in the womb of a teenage girl.*
- B. Luke gives us the account of the birth of that child, and how for 30 years *God indwelt his people in the form of Jesus, a literal descendent of David.*
- 1. John speaks of this indwelling in *John 1, The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*
 - 2. Paul describes this in *Colossians 1. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. And he is the head of the body, the church. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.*
 - 3. God was indwelling his people through Jesus.
- C. And then, when Jesus returned to heaven, God indwelt the church in the form of the Holy Spirit.
- 1. Jesus describes this arrangement in *John 14, I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Because I live, you also will live. You will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.* This speaks of

God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit all indwelling the church.

2. Paul speaks in Ephesians 2 of *God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*
3. And Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:16, *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*
4. What this means is that God indwells the world in the form of the church.
 - a. This is true worldwide.
 - b. And it's also true here at Sonnenberg. God indwells this corner of Wayne County through Sonnenberg Mennonite Church.
 - (1) Just look around at us.
 - (2) God is here in the midst of us.
 - (a) He indwells us and through us the world around us.
 - (b) We are a unit through which God aims to accomplish his goals for Wayne County.

D. And not only does God indwell us as a corporate body, but he indwells us as individuals.

1. Paul describes this in Ephesians 3, *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*
2. And in Romans 8 he says, *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.*
3. Now isn't that an incredible image—The Spirit of God lives in you?!
 - a. But that is how we Christians understand our relationship with God.
 - b. He dwells in us through his Spirit. He transforms us. He makes us righteous and holy and blesses us.
 - c. He fills us with fruit of the Spirit. He grants us gifts of the Spirit.
 - d. He can turn the worst renegade into a child of God because he takes up residence inside our hearts.

IV. Now my title today is "The Right Face Can Do a Lot for a Dismal Place," and I began by

looking at what happened when the face of Stella Thompson Kollath and her husband Art indwelt the dismal place of the Elisha/Sarah/Harry Thompson farmstead in 1910.

- A. When I was honored to give the chief testimonial at the memorial service we grandchildren held on the farm in 2006, I called what was established at the Thompson farm with the arrival of Stella and her husband Art Kollath the “Art and Stella Acceptance and Assistance Corp.”
- B. Art and Stella brought a new spirit of life and light and joy and peace to that farm as they indwelt it.
- C. In the same way Jesus brought a new spirit of life and light and joy and peace as he came to earth and indwelt it.
 - 1. Now we can look at this academically as we think about God indwelling the earth through Jesus, and Jesus and the Holy Spirit indwelling the church which is the body of Christ on earth.
 - 2. But it’s kind of hard to think of it academically as we think about God *strengthening us with power through his Spirit in our inner being, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith.*
 - a. The indwelling face of God dwells in us.
 - (1) I want you to wrap your arms around your body so that you can feel it, and then I want you to consciously say to yourself, “This body is a vessel through which God dwells in the midst of the world today.”
 - (a) I am a lamp from which the light of God shines in a dark and dismal place.
 - (b) When people look at me they see the face of God.
 - (2) Your body is the site of an incredible spiritual reality.
 - (3) The spiritual has come to indwell the physical.
 - (4) And this miracle is resident within you.
 - b. Our point for today is that God dwells in us.
 - (1) That God who was enthroned between the cherubim on the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and the temple—He dwells in us.
 - (2) That God who was present in the world through Jesus—He dwells in us.
 - (3) That God who is present in the church—He dwells in us.
 - c. There is wonder in that. We—weak and unworthy vessels that we are—God dwells in us.
 - d. What a wonder! What a miracle! Our bodies, no less that Mary’s body great with child, carry about within us the indwelling face of God.
- D. Leads us to ponder the question that is posed in #182, Oh How Shall I Receive Thee.