

Please read today's preaching text from Second Samuel 7:1-17 before continuing.

Grace and peace be unto you from God our heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

When it comes to elections, I am fairly certain that we have all heard the phrase, "It's the economy, stupid." I was surprised to learn that it's not that old, the phrase was only coined in 1992. Yet before you start rolling your eyes or your blood pressure begins to rise, I am not going to be talking about the election. Rather I hope you will listen to what, (or whose), economy I am talking about. In a commentary on today's preaching text by Sara Koenig, a professor of Biblical Studies at Seattle Pacific University, she wrote, "The details of this chapter demonstrate important truths about the nature of a relationship with God, when grace—and not works—is the currency in the divine economy."

What a delightful quote and what a wonderful connection to make on this last Sunday of October, which we in the Lutheran Church celebrate as Reformation Sunday. In our economy, practically everything is based on works. We are all taught from the time we are young things like "You can't get somethin' for nothin'." If you want something, you have to work for it. No one's going to hand you everything on a silver platter. I believe for these reasons it can be difficult for us to comprehend what it even means to say that "grace—and not works—is the currency in the divine economy."

Nevertheless, as your preacher, and as Lutherans, we persist. First of all, I think part of our trouble is that many of us associate God, and Christianity, and perhaps preaching in general with "fire and brimstone." For generations what has passed as good Biblical preaching has focused almost solely on the law. "Do this... and 'Thou shalt not do this' ...or else. The problem with this is that the law always condemns us. Martin Luther, the founder of the Lutheran Church, discovered this some five hundred years ago and tried to get us to focus far less on the law and instead on the Gospel which sets us free! Alas, sometimes I think we still have this perverse tendency to enjoy being stuck in our own muck. So we wallow in our sinfulness rather than celebrate our rightful place as freed and beloved children of God.

With that, let's turn our attention to today's reading from Second Samuel, chapter seven. In the very first verse, did you happen to catch what Professor Koenig calls "the important truth about the nature of a relationship with God?" The chapter begins, "Now when the king settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him..." God has shown grace to King David. David is granted a time of Sabbath. It is because of God's doing that David is not at war. While in our economy, we might hear this and think that David had "earned" this time of rest, I hear it as the first of the important truths.

In verse two, David speaks to the prophet Nathan and it reveals that at this point, David is still very much thinking in terms of the old economy. "I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." In other words, it doesn't feel right that God did this for me, I have to pay God back, I cannot have a house that is more grand than God's. David feels the need to build God a proper house, a temple. Now on the one hand, this idea may be commendable, a genuine act of piety. On the other hand though(?) it could also be seen as a way for David (as the new king) to assert himself to the people as the legitimate king because having a temple was believed to be something of a guarantee that God would stay put.

Now even though at first Nathan offers David his blessing, in verse four we are told, "But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan..." God wanted to put a halt to the building project before any plans were even drawn up and any ground was broken. God wants Nathan to instead inform David, 'I have not lived in a house all this time — "since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day" — and it's all been good. Don't you think that if I wanted a house built, I would have commanded one of my previous shepherds (that is, leaders) to do that by now?'

And at this, God goes on to remind David the important truth, that it has been by God's grace that David was taken from the pasture to become the prince over God's people. David received this honor freely, not because he deserved it or earned it. God has been with him wherever he went and again, it is thanks to God that David's enemies have been cut off from before him. And then, just to be sure David doesn't miss it (nor

anyone else), God goes from speaking of God's graciousness in the past to say how it will be true in the future. In verse nine, "I will make for you a great name." And in verse ten, "I will appoint a place... so that my people Israel may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more." And in verse eleven, "I will give you rest." And then the culmination of all of this is, "I will make you a house."

Now if you are wondering, 'But David already had a house, didn't he?' You are correct. But what God is referring to here is *house* as another term for dynasty. In other words, God has flipped the script! David is not to build a house for God, that is, a temple. Rather God is promising something that is far beyond what David was expecting — David's rule will be the first in a long line, God is choosing to build him a house, a dynasty. There is a verse in Ephesians, chapter three that says, "Now to him who... is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine, to him be glory" (v. 20). This is a case of that very thing — and it has to be accomplished solely by God's grace, freely.

Now if that isn't enough, Old Testament Biblical scholar William Brueggeman says, "In these [next] verses the oracle moves to its most extravagant claim." Returning to my introduction, this is where we might say that the phrase, "It's the economy, stupid" becomes most clear. Meaning we had better not miss the important truth that God's divine economy is based on grace, and not works. This is seen particularly in verses thirteen to sixteen. Of David's own offspring God says, "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me." And even though the son may sin and he will be punished for it, he will never, never be rejected. God says unequivocally, "I will not take my steadfast love from him." And while God says he indeed took it away from Saul, clearly, with David, this is a new day. This striking promise ends with, "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me."

What makes this so striking and such Good News for us is as Brueggeman says, "Heretofore God's commitments to Israel are regularly and characteristically conditional... Indeed, the whole of Mosaic faith, sounded by Joshua and Samuel as well, is that God's good inclination depends on Israel's obedience." In other words, we all lived

under the “if” of requirement — it was the curse of the law, the old economy that said I will only give you blessing *if* you have earned it. With David and with this promise however, the “if” has disappeared! It has been replaced with the conjunction *nevertheless*. That is to say, even though we mess up before God, we cannot measure up and therefore we deserve punishment, *nevertheless* God responds with ‘Because of my promise to David and his offspring, I will never revoke my unconditional love.’

Now can you see why people saw Jesus as the Son of David? Certainly, before Jesus there were generations of Davids. But what God had spoke through the mouth of Nathan in these verses created communities of hope. The lasting hope that emerged was that there is a coming David who will right wrong in the world and establish good governance through love, not by might or by violence. And so as we hear in Luke, chapter one, “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to Mary and said to her that she will conceive and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord will give to him the throne of his ancestor David” (Luke 1:26ff). And it came to pass that Jesus was born. Where? In Bethlehem, the city of David. And of course, we believe and we confess that Jesus grew up to embody what a Son of David was meant to do and to be. And we also believe that God is still shaping communities of hope to have faith in the important truth that our relationship with God is all about grace. Amen

Narrative.3 2 Samuel 7:1-17

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