

# Story and Meditation: The Home of the Lord

December 20, 2020

Fourth Sunday of Advent

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Luke 1:26-38

by *Eric Anderson*

The moli – that’s a Laysan albatross in English – was resting on the nest, keeping her egg warm, when the kolea came by. Her mate was off fishing.

“Welcome back,” said the kolea.

“Thank you,” said the moli. “How was the summer here on Kauai?”

“Good heavens,” said the kolea, “I don’t know. I was in Alaska.”

“Alaska?” said the moli. “That’s a long way to go for a summer vacation.”

“Vacation?” said the kolea. “I didn’t go there for vacation. That’s my home. I was born there.”

“Oh,” said the moli. “I’m sorry, I had it backwards. So you come here in the winter for vacation.”

“Well, no,” said the kolea. “This is home, too.”

“You have two homes?” said the moli. “That sounds complicated.”

“I suppose,” said the kolea, “it does make for some very long over-ocean flights twice a year, but I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“Besides,” said the kolea, “you’re hardly one to talk. You’ve got two homes, too.”

“No,” said the moli. “I only have one.”

“Then where have you been all these months?”

“Home.”

“Home?” asked the kolea. “I thought this was home.”

“Well,” said the moli, “this is where I was born, and where my chicks will hatch. But this isn’t home. Home is the open sea, with the shoals of fish below me and the open skies above me. This is just a place to make a nest, take a rest, and brood a chick. When it’s old enough, we’ll all go back home.”

The kolea thought about this.

“You have a big home,” he said.

“Yes,” said the moli in reply. “I do.”

What makes a home for God?

David had become a monarch. He had led a successful rebellion against the previous monarch, King Saul, though without fighting a major battle. Saul and most of his heirs had died in battle against a rival nation, leaving David in a good place to step in and seize authority. After some years, David had united all twelve tribes of Israel under his rule and defended the united kingdom against foreign raids and invasions. He had conquered a city and made it his new capital, Jerusalem, and brought the ark of the covenant, the most tangible sign of God’s presence and favor to the nation, into the city.

Jerusalem was his home, the home of his ruling descendants, the cultural home of his nation. Should it not also be the site of a home for God?

Successful monarchs of the ancient world, if they wanted to continue to be successful monarchs, honored the deities that had supported their success. Military victories, the births of heirs, signatures of important treaties, relief from natural disasters: all might be celebrated with the construction of a temple. In like manner, rulers might also build a temple to address a crisis and enlist the deity’s aid in a famine or plague or revolution. Both the deity and the deity’s followers would be more likely to support the royal program. Temples across the ancient world have risen in these ways, as for example, Heiau Pu’ukohola, that Kamehameha believed would help him win undisputed rulership of Hawai’i Island.

David also seems to have felt both gratitude to God for all the help he’d received in the long years of being Saul’s general, then an outlaw, and finally a ruler. He seems to have felt discomfort with the notion that he received more obvious honors than God in his capital city. If the king had a house of cedar – which means, actually, a house with cedar paneling on the walls, very fragrant and very expensive – then God should have a temple.

But as Cheryl Lindsay writes at [ucc.org](http://ucc.org), “In the uncertain times in which we live, it is easy to identify with David’s struggle. What he wants to do seems right, even seems to be an act of tremendous faithfulness and devotion to God, yet it also betrays a lack of trust in God and a question of God’s Sovereignty. David thinks that he is in charge now and confuses his agency

and delegated power with the sovereignty that only rests in God who cannot be contained for our comfort.”

God first has to correct the prophet Nathan on this point, and then correct David himself. God has no need for a house because God already has a house. The home of God is not the tent David thinks it is; the home of God is the nation God has been building. The home of God is the planted people of Israel blossoming in peace. The home of God is the house of David, meaning the nation that stretches down the years into the future.

About a thousand years later, God had a very different notion of house and home.

A lot of wording sounds familiar, though, does it not? Gabriel said to Mary, “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Gabriel’s words echo the words to David centuries before – and words given to David’s successors as well.

This time, however, those words came associated with a unique promise to a specific individual: the birth of a Messiah, one who is holy, “he will be called Son of God.” Although the words had been said before, the shape they would take would be like nothing else.

God, who had always made a home among the people, now made a home as a person, as a child, as a youngster, as a teenager, as an adult.

A home with us. A home among us. A home that... includes us.

Meister Eckhart wrote, “Again: If I am in a higher place and say to some one, ‘Come up hither,’ that might be difficult for him. But if I say, ‘Sit down,’ that would be easy. Thus God dealeth with us. When man humbles himself, God cannot restrain His mercy; He must come down and pour His grace into the humble man, and He gives Himself most of all, and all at once, to the least of all. It is essential to God to give, for His essence is His goodness and His goodness is His love.”

Mary literally gave of herself to make that home for God – this time a home that God had requested, not one that had been conceived by the imagination of a monarch.

So what does it mean for us to make a home for God?

First, I think it means to recognize that all places are God’s home, and to treat them with that kind of reverence and respect. The risk of designating some places as holy and some places as not is that we treat the former places well and, well, we treat the other places badly. What would it look like if we cared for the barren expanses of lava rock the way we do for Church of the Holy Cross? What would it look like if we treated the open ocean with the same care we do

Rainbow Falls? What would it look like if we valued the ground that contains crude oil as much as we valued the oil itself?

It would look rather different, wouldn't it, and much more like a home for God?

I think it also means that we recognize that all people are God's home, just as David was told three millennia ago. The people we love are not just the people who love us, they are also manifestations of God's love. The people we meet are not just the people we see or hear, they are also expressions of God's presence on Earth. The people we have not and never will meet are not just strangers, they are the greater expanse of God's nature, part of the mystery that endures.

Dare we leave a manifestation of God without a roof? Dare we leave a manifestation of God hungry? Dare we leave a manifestation of God unloved, uncared for?

And yet... we do.

A home for God also means a home for God in us. This is frequently the first place we go, and yet it may be the hardest to do. For Mary, the welcoming of God into this home was no easy matter. As Debie Thomas writes at [journeywithjesus.net](http://journeywithjesus.net), "Mary's favored status led her straight from scandal to danger to the trauma of her son's crucifixion. God's call required her to be profoundly countercultural, to trust an inner vision that flew in the face of everything her community expected of her." If we make a home for God in our own spirits, we may have to set aside our control over our lives, our expectations, our social status, our dignity, our safety. Making God a home within us may bring us peace, but it is a peace tested by stress and perhaps even conflict.

Perhaps it is more evident why the world, the home of God, shows so few signs of being the home of God, when we realize just how reluctant we are to open ourselves to being God's home.

This is our challenge and our call. As Karoline Lewis writes at Working Preacher, "Mary's story moves us all from who we think we are to what God has called us to be, from observant believer to confessing apostle. Moreover, remarkably, impossibly, Mary's story demands that we acknowledge the very transformation of God. It is no small journey to go from our comfortable perceptions of God to God in the manger, vulnerable, helpless, dependent. Yet, this is the promise of Christmas."

Make a home for God in your spirit. Make a home for God among people. Make a home for God in the world.

Amen.