

**I Kings 8:(1,6,10-11, 22-30, 41-43)**

**“God’s Faithfulness Throughout Generations”**

**November 20, 2011**

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**San Dimas Community Church, United Church of Christ**

Today’s text describes the dedication of the temple which was completed by King Solomon. All the people gather ‘round; the Ark of the Covenant is ushered to its new place within the temple; a cloud covers the assembly as though the very presence of God hovers in a blessing as the temple is dedicated.

Then King Solomon gives a speech recounting God’s promises to his father David which have now come to fulfillment in the dedication of this temple. Solomon prays for God’s continued faithfulness to follow Israel in all the days to come. He declares that God’s presence cannot be limited to within the temple walls. God is both transcendent and incarnate, above and below, behind and ahead. God lives and moves and has being with all creation.

It is one of God’s great miracles that God is not thwarted or contained by anything of human design. Even in our weaknesses, in the muck we make of life, God’s miracle of possibilities can still work the divine purpose. We cannot ruin things for God. God is faithful throughout all generations.

God’s faithfulness took form within this congregation on May 20, 1912. We will soon celebrate 100 years of God’s faithfulness here. Each month we have taken one decade of our church’s 100 years to recall what was happening both within the church and out in the world. We now have reached the decade of 1952-1962.

Here are a few events that happened within this decade: The Supreme Court struck down “separate but equal” schooling in *Brown vs. Board of Education*. The World Council of Churches convened for the first time in 1954. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus. Disneyland opened. Studies showed that 80% of L.A.’s smog was due to cars. Sputnik I orbited the earth in 1957. In 1960 Congress passed the voting rights act. The Berlin Wall was erected in 1961. In 1962 Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring* and Vatican II convened.

During this same decade in the church, Rev. Ellis continued as pastor. Then, in 1958, Rev. Peter Jansen became our pastor. During his three years, 324 members were listed on the church register. The theater chairs in the sanctuary were replaced by our current pews; the Bride’s Room and minister’s office were renovated. San Dimas Community Church became San Dimas Community Church United Church of Christ!

San Dimas became a city and many members of the church were leaders in the community. Stanley Plummer became the first mayor. Following Rev. Jansen, the Rev. Richard Spears came for a short tenure that carried the church to the end of this decade.

These monthly sermons on each church decade I’ve thought of as “Variations on a Theme,” and the variation I’d suggest for the decade of 1952-62 would be “continued faithfulness.” For the continued faithfulness of those who came before and behind us, today we give thanks. For the God whose promise is sure and whose has greeted people in this sanctuary for almost a century, we give thanks.

Like Solomon’s congregation gathered in Israel’s temple, we gather to worship God who we trust to be faithful throughout all generations.

We come to share burdens that are too heavy to be born on just our shoulders. We come to be inspired and energized to live lives with meaning and purpose.

We come to discern how God can use us as faithful servants in our generation and in our world.

Some of us come here with heavy hearts longing for a word to encourage us “to keep on keeping on,” to hear again that God is faithful throughout generations.

Some of us come in mourning because of recent or long ago losses of those they’ve loved and we come to remember that God is faithful throughout generations.

Some of us come with the burden of financial difficulties, the stress of not knowing if our homes and jobs are safe and secure. We need to hear that God is faithful throughout generations.

Some of us come with the anxiety of parenting, the challenges of raising children in our world today, the struggles of relating to children who sometimes break our hearts but never break our love. We need to hear that God is faithful throughout generations.

Some of us come aging and all that goes along with it -- loss of memory and mobility, loss of the ability to drive and socialize, to participate as we once could in church, community, and work. We need to hear that God is faithful through all generations.

Some of us come with medical problems either life threatening or life limiting. We come in various stages of physical distress or pain. We need to hear that God is faithful throughout generations.

Some of us come to church longing to find strength in our daily lives. We are teachers, laborers, retirees, managers, caregivers, and volunteers. All people whose work poses challenges, stress, and problems and here we come to rest and wait on God and to be reminded that God is faithful throughout generations.

We come because we belong to each other, to this community, and to God. We are not our own; God made us and into God’s hands we place our lives and our futures because we believe that God is faithful throughout generations.

Several months ago I prepared a video that for me captures the spirit of thanksgiving for our church. In deep appreciation and gratitude, I would like to play this once again as we praise God who is indeed faithful throughout generations. (Play video.)

My professor, James Sanders, wrote a short book, *God Has a Story, Too*. The end of the book has a summary of God’s faithfulness through the generations. And that summary ends like this: If God could go with Abram from Ur of Chaldees to Palestine, down to Egypt, out of Egypt with a motley crew of refugee slaves, through the desert, conquer Palestine with Joshua, and take Jerusalem with David -- why not Bethlehem?

After all, it’s only five miles down there out the Jaffa Gate on the old road that runs by Rachel’s Tomb... And if he was with Joseph in prison and granted his presence in the huts and hovels of slaves in Egypt with Moses, don’t you reckon he could crouch down into the cradle of a Jewish baby in Bethlehem, if he was of a mind?

The point would be that you just don’t know what God’s already been through if you think he couldn’t get into that cradle in Bethlehem and onto that cross on Golgotha -- and roll a stone away from a tomb, for that matter, if it was his mind to do so and on his agenda to bring righteousness and salvation to the world in that way.

God’s story is that God is faithful through all generations. So today we give thanks and praise. We share this simple meal which to others may seem an odd ritual, but to us is a way to show that we know and remember, that God is faithful through all generations, and God is faithful to us today.