

**October 31, 2021**

**1 Kings 5:1-6, 13-18; 8:1-13**

**We Celebrate**

**Rev. Kelley L. Becker**

### **Sermon and Scripture**

There are some people who think a celebration is not a celebration without balloons. Others require noise makers, pizza, or cupcakes. Me? I don't need any of that. All I need is a little bit of confetti. Confetti screams, "Let's party!"

A mom shared a story about her son on Twitter recently.

Her son was buckled into the backseat of the car when he asked her, "Is it okay to throw the confetti in my pocket?"

"What?" she exclaimed. "Why do you have confetti in your pocket?"

Unphased, he answered. "It's emergency confetti. I carry it everywhere in case there's good news." One person responded to her story, tweeting, "I carry a bottle of bubbles with me for the same reason, just in case I run across something to celebrate." There is something here for us to learn.

So, I let my imagination run wild this week, as I considered what it would be like to take time every day to celebrate all the things that deserve to be celebrated happening around us.

Wednesday night, I was at the church later than usual and, as I was leaving the building, I had the overwhelming urge to throw confetti into the air as I stood in the Fellowship Hall where I could hear and see the choir rehearsing and I could see young people walking down the hallway to Connections where there was a grown-up dressed like a cat, ready to greet them.

Last year at this time, I would have been standing in the Fellowship Hall in darkness and silence. If I had had confetti in my pocket Wednesday night, I would have let it fly. This season has taught me to be grateful

for the gift of being church together, for the singers and silliness, the ones praying and the ones playing, your love and your light. There is a lot to celebrate!

Today's text is a story of celebration. And, like a lot of celebrations, it was a long road to get there, some of it wasn't pretty, in fact, it was quite messy. Last week, we read about David's call to be the next king of Israel. The Narrative Lectionary preaching schedule skips over all of David's reign and into his son, Solomon's reign. Although Solomon did not come to office by divine intervention, God clearly approved of Solomon.

God visited Solomon in a dream and asked him what he wanted. God was pleased that Solomon responded by asking for wisdom to lead the nation. In fact, God was so pleased that, not only did Solomon receive wisdom, but he also was promised and received incredible wealth. I don't love that story because it presents God in sort of a genie-esque roll that I find icky, but the point is, Solomon began his reign with the right idea.

Anyway, back when David was king, he wanted to build a temple for God, but he was told by God that he would not build it, his son would. So, having inherited a relatively peaceful kingdom, Solomon had time on his hands which he dedicated to having the temple built. The temple would hold deep meaning for the Israelite community. It was built on Mount Moriah where the story of Abraham and Isaac took place. You will remember, in the story, had it not been for God's intervention, Abraham would have sacrificed his son Isaac. This was land that, according to the story, David purchased to make a sacrifice to avert the death angel, which had caused a plague killing 70,000 people. The point is, the temple was built on land where, despite dire circumstances with death on the horizon, life prevailed.

King Solomon partnered with King Hiram of Tyre for the wood needed for the temple. He also forced Israelites to work on the temple (that's a sermon for another day) and presto! The temple was finished. To be fair, there wasn't really a "presto." It took 7 years to build. Like much of today's construction, temple walls and objects were created elsewhere and brought to the building site where they were assembled and installed. Gold was everywhere, inside and out. Artistic and architectural merit made the temple something to behold. Unlike other temples to other deities, there were no idols anywhere in this temple. Instead of images of gods, there were decorations of palm trees, flowers, and cherubim, reminders of God's creation.<sup>1</sup> And that is where we pick up the story today. This is 1 Kings 8:1-13:

8 Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion. <sup>2</sup> All the people of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the festival in the month Ethanim (**Eh** thanim), which is the seventh month. <sup>3</sup> And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests carried the ark. <sup>4</sup> So they brought up the ark of the Lord, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up. <sup>5</sup> King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. <sup>6</sup> Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. <sup>7</sup> For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim made a covering above the ark and its poles. <sup>8</sup> The poles were

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Lusk Brooke and Zoe G. Quinn, "Building the World: Solomon's Temple," <https://blogs.umb.edu/buildingtheworld/iconic-monuments/solomons-temple-israel/> (accessed October 28, 2021).

so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the holy place in front of the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside; they are there to this day. <sup>9</sup> There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses had placed there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites, when they came out of the land of Egypt. <sup>10</sup> And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, <sup>11</sup> so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.

<sup>12</sup> Then Solomon said,

“The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness.

<sup>13</sup> I have built you an exalted house,  
a place for you to dwell in forever.”

The rest of chapter 8 is a description of the magnificent celebration that lasted for days. There was music, instruments and singing, people were everywhere, and there were so many animals to be sacrificed that extra holding space was required. In this chapter, King Solomon prayed one of the most beautiful prayers in the Bible, and in it, the King acknowledges that God cannot be contained, not on earth or the heavens, and certainly not in a temple. God will be God, everywhere, all the time.

While this kind of celebration is a bit out of our area of familiarity, this story reminds us that God’s people are called to celebration and worship. God likes a party! And God’s love is worthy of a party! Sometimes celebration is hard for us as an outwardly focused church, though, because we live in a world in which many of our neighbors seem to have nothing to celebrate. They are hungry, unsheltered, addicted, in danger, and filled with despair. And if we are honest, some of us are too. We are grieving, some of us are still self-isolating due to COVID. We are sad, deeply sad. We are angry at a world in which white

supremacy and othering the most vulnerable is the norm. Celebrating seems a bit tone deaf. The optics seem wrong if nothing else.

It occurs to me, though, that celebration helps us notice the ways in which the world is being made right and, in some cases, the ways in which we are contributing to that. What we celebrate today is not a completed job well-done, but a series of small acts of love, compassion, and being community, that has mended some of the brokenness in the world and has given, not only our neighbors, but all of us, some glimmers of hope and reminders that there is nowhere we can go where God is not. And that is worth celebrating.

We can learn something from that little boy with confetti in his pocket. We can be the people who always come prepared to celebrate good news. I've seen you in so many ways being the people who are *bringing the good news* of God's love to our neighbors and to each other. I want to encourage all of us to be ready to celebrate the good news too. Throw the confetti, blow the bubbles, enjoy the balloon bouquets and make a lot of noise. And because I recognize that often confetti is frowned upon, I have come prepared with an alternative, birdseed. So in a little while, we are going to take a page from that little boy's book and have an emergency celebration. At the end of worship, you are invited to come outside and throw birdseed confetti as we celebrate God in and around all of us. There is a lot to celebrate. I will end this morning by showing you the proof of that.

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