

## **Giving Freely**

### **I Chronicles 29: 1-18**

We have become very accustomed at my house to the weekday PBS kids morning line up. We usually get down the stairs in time for Jakers—the Adventures of Piggly Winks. We know that if we leave in the middle of Dragon Tales, we're running just about on time. But some days, we're running behind and we catch a few minutes (or more) of Zaboomafoo—funny name, but it's really a great show. The hosts are two brothers and a leaping lemur named Zaboomafoo. The Kratt brothers and Zabo lead children through a world of animal discovery. On one particular day when we were running behind, we saw a few minutes of the show and it was all about the different kinds of homes that animals build for themselves. It is a fact of nature that all creatures need some kind of place that they can call their own...a place that is set apart from the rest of the animal world...a place of safety and refuge. The show highlighted how some animals make nests, others dens, some animals dig holes in the ground or build mounds to create a separate, safe place for themselves and their young. People too have the same natural instincts as these animals...we need a home, a place where we can get out of the weather, the danger...a place where we can feel safe.

Habitat for Humanity is an organization that understands the importance of having a home. According to the Habitat for Humanity International's website: **"Millions of Americans face a housing crisis...an estimated 5.1 million American families have "worst-case" housing needs—"worst case" in that they are forced to pay more than half their income for housing, endure overcrowded conditions and/or live in houses with severe physical deficiencies.**

**Worldwide, the need is even greater.** Some 2 billion people worldwide live in poverty housing. More than 1 billion live in urban slums, and that figure is expected to double by 2030.

**The Consequences of not having a home are extreme.** The high cost of housing leaves low-income families little money for other basic necessities like food, clothing or health care. Substandard housing can endanger the health and safety of its occupants, erode their hope and self-worth, and impair their children's ability to succeed in school.

**Habitat for Humanity is changing lives.** Working in partnership with low-income families to build decent homes they can afford to buy, Habitat helps to break the cycle of poverty and hopelessness. By the end of 2005, more than 1 million people worldwide will live in decent, affordable Habitat for Humanity houses."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Habitat For Humanity. <http://www.habitat.org/how/why.aspx>](http://www.habitat.org/how/why.aspx)

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The many businesses and individuals who donate to and work with Habitat for Humanity understand the importance of having a home. It is a very basic and fundamental human need.

In today's Scripture, it is not the anthropomorphic, human need for a home that is described...but rather the necessity of having a home for God. That might seem strange to think about God needing a physical house in which to live...but the words of Jesus in Matthew, chapter 8 vs. 20 echo in back of our minds: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

And even well before the incarnation of Christ...the people of Israel, who had experienced God in mystical & mysterious ways as well as in very anthropomorphic (human) ways, felt the need to build a house for God. Before majestic dwelling places were built, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob would pitch their tents and build an altar for God...

Moses was specifically instructed by God in Exodus 25: 1-10 to "tell the Israelites to take for me an offering; from all whose hearts prompt them to give, you shall receive the offering for me...and have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them." And thus an offering was taken up and the tabernacle was built.

Many years later King David, ruler of Judah, announced his intention to build "a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, for the footstool of our God" but God said to King David, "you shall not build a house for my name, for you are a warrior and have shed blood...It is your son Solomon who shall build my house and my courts." And so we catch up with the Scripture from today where we hear this moving speech by King David, who had contributed much to the Temple building project, and his speech was for the people to "willingly consecrate themselves before the Lord," by bringing forth their offerings. And they did...some brought small sums, some larger...but they all did so "willingly...with a single mind they had offered freely to the Lord." And King David rejoiced greatly.

This Sunday is the third in our series focusing on Stewardship...and today in particular is "Consecration Sunday." Consecration is another big, churchy kind of word...what it means is "to dedicate something to a sacred purpose"<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. <<http://m-w.com/dictionary/consecrate>>

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On that day long ago, the Israelites dedicated themselves and their offerings to the sacred purpose of building a Temple...a home for God. It is that sacred purpose that they rallied around...that sacred purpose that allowed them all to work with a single mind...bringing what each one could and offering it freely to the Lord.

It was the sacred purpose of providing a home that mobilized volunteers to donate time, talents and money to build a Habitat House for the Gallagher Family. “Mary Gallagher would tell you that she doesn’t see anything special about her life. She says she does what she must to get by. This 25-year-old single mother is raising three children, one of whom is disabled, and her 16-year-old sister.

Gallagher works her shift job putting together circuit boards. To afford rent, she had taken on three roommates--all eight people shared a two-bedroom, dilapidated apartment. Now Mary and her family live in a new Habitat house in a Habitat community that college students helped build.

’Habitat has truly healed my family, as it has so many others,” says Gallagher. “Not only has Habitat helped me gain a beautiful new home, but also a brighter, healthier future for my children. Thank you so much for your kind and loving hearts. Without people like you, my family would still be lost in the crowd.’”<sup>3</sup>

It is most always a sacred purpose...some compelling purpose (like building a home for God or building a home for a needy family) that moves people to dedicate themselves to it. So today, at Sumner First Christian Church we are consecrating ourselves...but to what purpose you might ask?

We have built a Sanctuary—a home for God. We participate in such projects as Paint Tacoma Beautiful and our once a month dinner for the homeless. We contribute outreach monies to community services and Disciples Home Missions. We have a dedicated group of Elders, Shepherds and Diaconate who work to make sure that people are cared for and the logistics of worship services and special events are tended to. We have devoted ourselves to Thursday morning studies, to Wednesday Night Alive, to Sunday morning worship. We have cooked, painted, cleaned, gardened, built, repaired... We have done many things that are compelling, many things that are sacred.

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<sup>3</sup> Habitat for Humanity. <[http://www.habitat.org/faces\\_places/hom/healing\\_a\\_family.aspx#PO-O](http://www.habitat.org/faces_places/hom/healing_a_family.aspx#PO-O)>

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So to what purpose do we consecrate ourselves on this special day? Well...we have a statement that says our purpose is to “to share God’s love as a diverse community of individuals through: \*Joyful Praise, \*Willing Commitment, \*Exploring and Learning and \*Active Service. That is the purpose to which we consecrate ourselves today.

But I want you to think first and foremost about the first part of that statement: Our purpose is to share God’s love. Our *purpose is to share God’s love*.

But in order to share God’s love, you must remember how it was that God first loved you. We know that God loved the world so much that he gave us his Son...we know that long ago that Son went before us to prepare a place for us...that in God’s house there are many rooms—a place for each one of us. But I wonder how it is that God’s love first touched your heart or healed your pain? Perhaps God loved you by giving you strength and patience during a time of personal trial...perhaps God loved you through the people who called and visited after the death of a loved one...perhaps God loved you by assuring you that you are special and beautiful even when other kids at school teased you and told you that you were not...or perhaps God loved you by comforting you when you felt powerless in the face of a family crisis. I suspect, I hope that each person is here today because God’s love at some time in your life, provided you with a home...a place set apart where you could come out of the weather, out of the danger...a place where you felt safe and accepted.

And our sacred purpose to which we dedicate ourselves this morning is the purpose of sharing God’s love...for perhaps there are some here today looking for just such a home...perhaps there is someone that you will meet tomorrow or next week who will be looking for just such a home...Jesus assures us that the poor will always be with us so there will always be meals to serve, stories to share, clothes to provide, earthly homes to build.

When the Israelites came forward bringing what they could offer for the Temple, I suspect they knew that God was really much bigger than any building they could imagine or construct...I am sure they understood at some level that God could not be contained in any one place at any one time.

God is bigger than the Temple...God is bigger than a Sanctuary...God is bigger than any home built by human hands. And because that is true, we dedicate ourselves to the sacred purpose of sharing God’s love by doing what we can. The Israelites built a Temple, Habitat for Humanity builds homes. And we at Sumner First Christian church are seeking to learn more and more each day what it is that we can do...

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As we search for answers and wait for discernment may the fire of God's love burn in your heart, stirring you to give freely as you dedicate yourself to the purpose of sharing God's love. Amen.