

July 18, Ordinary 16B (2 Samuel 7:1-14a)

God promises to build a *bayit*, a house. But not one with boundaries.

by [Yvette Schock](#) in the [June 30, 2021](#) issue

I hear the smack of the ball on the blacktop, then a thump as it hits the backboard. After a while the ball is silent, and I hear instead the metallic crunch of a small shovel biting into dirt and my son quietly muttering to himself about the miniature earthworks he is constructing on the bare edges of our backyard.

I work with half of my attention, keeping the other half tuned to the sounds outside. When it gets too quiet, I creep to the back door and slowly open the screen so its squeal doesn't draw his attention and give me away, so he doesn't know that I'm checking up on him.

His growing independence brings me both delight and apprehension. It is a gift to have a bit of time to myself when he runs outside to play, and I love to see him absorbed in work that he chooses, guided by his own imagination. But I also find it comforting to have him playing inside the house, always within eyesight or earshot.

Within the boundaries of our home there is safety. Our backyard is quite safe, too. But sometimes I am struck that it is just the first of many unboundaried places where my son will increasingly spend his time, out of my sight and away from my care. I know this is a good thing. But it doesn't keep me from getting up to check on him.

Home is a boundaried place. During the pandemic, the relative safety of home has taken on a new dimension. I have been grateful for my home in this time, keenly aware of the rest and safety many do not have. As the months passed, that sense of safety has been coupled with restlessness: longing for the energy and buzz of public spaces, wanting to get away from the confines of these four walls.

I wonder if David feels both comfort and restlessness at his home in Jerusalem. Within the first sentence of the reading from 2 Samuel, we hear that he is “settled” at home with “rest from all his enemies around him,” and then David is dreaming up a project to pitch to Nathan. The prophet tells the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind,” and I imagine David would be off and running if God didn’t speak to Nathan that same night.

David dreams of bringing the ark of God within a boundaried, “safe” home like his. But God firmly rejects David’s vision and reminds him just what is to be built and by whom. God reminds David of *God’s* action: moving with the people of Israel, taking him out of the pasture, making him prince over the people, cutting off his enemies, being with him wherever he goes.

God’s word is clear: as God has been steadfastly present in an unbounded, itinerant, active way in the past, so God will continue to be in the future. *God* will act, will build a *bayit*, a house. But in God’s promise, the *bayit* is not to be the boundaried structure of house or temple but the living, breathing, moving body of a dynasty—a family, called to lead, held by God’s unending promise.

In the children’s book *The Invisible String*, a mother comforts her two children when they run to be near her at night, frightened by a storm outside. She tells them about “the invisible string made of love” that always connects them, even when they are apart. I found this book in the library of my previous congregation’s preschool and made sure to read it once a year in our preschool chapel service. When a teacher retired or a child’s pet died, we read it again.

When I planned a service for All Saints’ Day in my current role as chaplain of a retirement community, I adapted the language of “the invisible string of love” for our prayers of remembrance. A few months later, COVID-19 arrived in our state—the first in the nation to be hit. Soon I was struggling to function as a chaplain working from home for an assisted living facility that was locked down.

Across the country, a friend wrote a note to her congregation as things began shutting down there, too: “This thought came to mind as I cuddled my little one to sleep tonight: God will hold you. . . . As foundation and bedrock. As the force that keeps us in place when the world is swirling. As a mother soothes a restless child.” I was comforted by her words, and I remembered the words of my All Saints’ prayer. I adapted it again for this strange circumstance, and I’ve said it more times than I can

count over the past year: “God’s love is the thread that holds us together with our loved ones, even when we are apart.”

Home is a boundaried place, safe and comfortable. In the past year, some of us have stayed home more than we could have ever imagined, while others went out to do work people depended on, longing to be safe at home. For some elders, home became a place of isolation and loneliness. Now that vaccines are widely available and the pandemic is slowing—here, though not everywhere—we are eager to step out of our homes. The elders I work with now can go out shopping with family and welcome visitors in their homes, and these reunions are a joyous thing.

In all this, God has been holding us in the *bayit* of God—not a boundaried house but the unboundaried, living, life-giving presence of God, moving with us wherever we go, holding us through uncertainty and grief, holding us together. Welcome home.