

**Sermon :: 09-November-2025**  
**Proper 27, Year C**

“ build [*My*] house ”

I don't know how cognizant *you've* been of it ... and *I*, as your preacher, haven't dwelt on it ... but over the last five months—since Trinity Sunday, back in June—our Old Testament lessons have carried us along the ‘downslope,’ as it were, of ancient Israel's history: the several centuries *after* the climactic reign of King David and his son Solomon's finally building the First Temple in Jerusalem [10<sup>th</sup> cent BCE]. These last many Sundays, we've traced the dissolution of a once strong, united Israel into two separate kingdoms ... the eventual overrun of the *Northern* Kingdom by the Assyrians (and thereafter, the North's virtual disappearance from the pages of history) [722 BCE] ... and then, the dithering of the *Southern* Kingdom—Judah— before *its* final fall to the Babylonians [586 BCE] ... *all* followed by the destruction of Jerusalem (*and* of Solomon's great Temple) and the subsequent exile of a great portion of Judah's populus<sup>1</sup> to live in what is now Iraq.

About fifty years *later*, however, the exiles are all permitted<sup>2</sup> to *return* to Israel.<sup>3</sup> And today, we hear the prophet Haggai speaking to the returned exiles, who, while they have rebuilt their *homes* in Israel ... are struggling *mightily* to re-establish their *lives*. Through Haggai, the Lord tells the people to stop tending to their *personal, private, self-serving* endeavors ... and, instead, get about doing the *Lord's* work: rebuilding God's house—that Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> For, God says, if you do *My* work, I will be *with* you! Even though what *you* are able to accomplish may be relatively small and inglorious ... I, the *Lord*, “will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill [the Temple] with splendor.”

The symbolism may be remote, for us: The (former) Temple in Jerusalem ... although of *unrivaled* significance in Old Testament culture as a witness to the covenant between God and God's People ... is not something many of today's Christians spend much time thinking about. And while the *metaphor* may sound, to us, a little off-key: God's ‘upending’ the nations of the world and shaking all their treasure into the Lord's *own* House ... the *message* ... even at the distance of some twenty-five hundred years ... is still clear: When we use our combined power ... dedicate our massed effort ... apply our collective force and devote our communal capabilities... to the will of *God* ... God will prosper—will shape, *augment, complete*—our work, into something that not only *pleases* God ... but also *reorders* the **world** to conform more closely to God's desires *for* the **world**.

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As a nation, we will honor, on Tuesday ... and are recognizing, today ... the efforts ... the commitment and the bravery, the grit and the sacrifice ... of this nation's veterans and active duty members of our armed forces.<sup>5</sup> For more than 250 years, men and women ... of all sorts and conditions (*BCP*, p 814) ... from all walks of life ... with all varieties of background and points-of-view ... have donned the

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<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, mainly its wealthier and more skilled citizens (doctors, artisans, poets, etc). Those who were poor were basically left to ‘make it on their own’ back in the homeland.

<sup>2</sup> By the Persians, who, in the intervening years, have conquered the Babylonians (!).

<sup>3</sup> Albeit under—and forevermore, during the biblical period—the authority of a foreign nation ... and ultimately, Rome.

<sup>4</sup> This will be the *Second* Temple, which the Romans will eventually destroy—never again to be rebuilt—in 69 or 70 CE.

<sup>5</sup> Technically, we honor our active duty military on Armed Forces Day, in May, but this holiday usually goes by, I fear, unmarked by almost all.

uniform and taken up the colors of this nation ... and *united*, to defend it ... protect and secure it ... thus allowing the *rest* of us—the overwhelming majority [~94%] of whom have *never* so served—to live in prosperity and peace: free to raise our own families, meet our own needs and pursue our own dreams ... all the while, placing these liberties in their *own* lives on **hold**—and sometimes, sacrificing them *forever*. Thanks be to God for our veterans—all of them—and *always*.

Emblematic of the women and men who are serving today and have served in the past[,] ... **the mottoes** of the respective branches of our armed forces tell a story of *dedication* and *commitment* ... *fortitude* and *selflessness* ... *coolness* **under** adversity and *integrity* **above** expedience:

- The Army: This we will defend
- The Marines: SEMPER FIDELIS (Always faithful)
- The Navy: NON SIBI SED PATRIÆ (Not for self, but for country)<sup>6</sup>
- The Air Force: Aim high<sup>7</sup>
- The Coast Guard: SEMPER PARATUS (Always ready)
- The Space Force: SEMPER SUPRA (Always above)

Together, these terse identities ... these tight-lipped portraits of both faculty *and* aspiration ... paint a picture of our nation's collective military power as a force *for* ... a disposition *toward* ... peace: if not, at *some* times (and sorrowfully), the actual *absence* of armed conflict ... then, at *all* times, the noble *pursuit* of a greater and safer ... morally superior ... and more mutually beneficial ... *end*, for humanity. *And, simultaneously*, these mottoes also telegraph a rigorous commitment to justice and honor ... courage and selflessness ... *ideal* above *ideology* ... in pursuing the highest possible good for the widest possible population.

In these few words ... and in the men and women who have embodied, and do embody, them ... we can, perhaps, discern—*generally*, at least—a certain consonance with the generative, merciful and affirming will of God, for humanity. For two-and-a-half centuries, this country—with, no doubt!, errors of heart, *here*, and errors of judgment, *there*—has asked its women and men in uniform to apply *our* collective force, as a people ... and devote *our* communal capabilities, as a nation ... to the building up of this world as *God's* House ... toward making this creation we've inherited, more and more, the Lord's *Temple*: *pleasing* to God and *aligned* with God's *principles*. And long may it be ever so.

But ... now ... in just *this* moment — and here, I beg your indulgence and, if need be, also your *pardon*, as I speak a bit more concretely and pointedly than I usually do, from this privileged perch you've entrusted to me — I am gravely concerned ... as both a Christian *and* a citizen ... that we are asking *some* members of our armed forces to pursue not *justice*, but raw *might*; not *honor*, but *expedience*; not the principles of *God*, but the principalities of *power*. For no matter how many allowances I may make ... how wide-angle a 'lens' I try to peer through ... how charitably I seek to understand our leaders' motivations ... I simply cannot see God—*anything* God—in the wanton annihilation of more than sixty-five human lives, to-date, in the destruction of sixteen small, defenseless boats plying the Caribbean and the eastern Pacific.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Navy actually has no *official* motto, but this one (inscribed over the doors of the chapel at Annapolis) is the one most often cited as the *unofficial* one.

<sup>7</sup> The motto concludes: Fly—Fight—Win.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/all-the-u-s-military-strikes-against-alleged-drug-boats> (accessed 09-Nov-2025).

The deployment of our estimable and precious military forces to summarily end the lives of other human beings—of *neighbors*, as Jesus would have us call them ... without evidence, without due process ... without notice, without confrontation, without even opportunity to surrender<sup>9</sup> ... upon bald and undocumented assertions of ‘facts’ and unarticulated, let alone untested, theories of law ... ¶dishonors our *nation*—by cravenly ignoring our deeply rooted commitment to the rule of law, not just when it *pleases* us ... but *especially* when it *doesn’t*; and, ***equally disturbingly*** ¶dishonors our *armed forces*—by making them pawns in the untethered, unchecked efforts of those in the highest echelons of political power who ... for reasons known only to themselves ... regard themselves justified in taking the gravest possible action ... against unnamed, unwarned and unprotected civilians ... irrespective of our nation’s being founded upon principles of fairness and openness ... the abhorrence of absolute power ... and a commitment to life and liberty.

And ... if, in both the *identity* and the *mission* of our nation’s military, writ large ... you, like I, perceive an arc bending toward the will of God for humanity ... then the ordering of these wanton, merciless attacks ***also*** dishonors ***God***—by arrogating to callous and calculating *human* hands—*politicians’* hands—the authority to summarily snuff out both the ***dignity*** and the ***destiny*** of others ... which *God* had ordained, as gracious *gift*.

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Veteran’s Day is, to be *sure*, the occasion for stirring parades and solemn speeches: for our gratitude and our admiration ... for the heartfelt celebration of service and the somber reckoning of its costs. And it is, *also*, I think, a day for us—all of us—to renew *our* commitment, as *citizens*—as the people in whose name our military women and men serve and on whose behalf they fight ... and as *Christians* ... to ensure we *never* order them to carry out missions that dishonor the highest human principles of this nation ... or the *will* of ***God*** for creation; to ensure that in *all* the work we ask *them* to undertake ... we can *always* see at least the *outlines* of the work God has given *us* to do: the work of resisting evil ... and repenting; the work of serving Christ in *all* persons ... and loving *neighbor* as self; the work of striving for *justice* and *peace* ... and respecting the dignity of *every* human creature.<sup>10</sup>

Combat is ugly ... and, at *times*, as a *final* resort, also necessary. Taking the lives of enemy-others is brutal ... and, at *times*, when all *other* means have been tried and exhausted, also justified. But we owe the men and women of our armed forces—past and present—our sacred commitment never to ask them to wage battle unless ***absolutely necessary*** ... never to engage them in conflict without the greatest ***possible justification***. And as Christians ... called to love and care for *every* human creature—on both ‘our’ side and ‘theirs’ ... we owe *God* no less a commitment, as well.

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<sup>9</sup> I consciously choose to say nothing here of issues of federalism (*i.e.*, the Constitution’s allocation of powers among the various branches of government) as these are a bit more contentious and fraught ... although not *also* without grave consequences for us as a nation.

<sup>10</sup> These are elements of our greater Baptismal Covenant (*BCP*, pp 304-05).