



A SERMON

by Rev. Victor H. Floyd: October 26, 2025



DANCING IN THE DARK

1 Kings 5:1-5¹

Now King Hiram of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon when he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father, for Hiram had always been a friend to David. Solomon sent word to Hiram, saying, "You know that my father David could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until he put them under the soles of his feet. But now the Lord my God has given me rest (peace) on every side; there is neither adversary nor misfortune. So I intend to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord said to my father David, 'Your son, whom I will set on

your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name.'

Read Chapters 6 & 7 for the details of Solomon's Temple.

1 Kings 8:1-13

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. All the people of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the festival in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests carried the ark. 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. 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. Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. 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. The poles were 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. 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. And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, 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. Then Solomon said, "The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell forever."

TODAY'S SERVICE IS THICK WITH THEMES—a holy mash-up, maybe a hot mess, but a heartfelt and sincere offering to God.

Theme 1. Quel mess

We are living in dark times. The civilized world is not just cracking, but being systematically dismantled, brazenly. (Elephant in the room time!) Democracy is being demolished like the East Wing of the White House. Institutions and long-held values are crumbling. Freedom of speech is under siege, and freedom of religion. This past Thursday in Alameda, the Rev. Jorge Bautista² of the SF Presbytery and the United Church of Christ was shot in the face with a pepper bomb, at point blank range by a masked ICE officer. It was intentional and consistent with their actions in Chicago. The forces of fascism plan to scare us, divide us, and control us. They will fail. Psalm 24: *The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it (belong to God). Lift up your heads, and be lifted up, and the King of glory shall come in!*

¹ Currently, we are preaching not from the Revised Common Lectionary but from the Narrative Lectionary.

See < <https://www.workingpreacher.org/home-narrative-lectionary> > (October 11, 2025)

² < <https://www.newsweek.com/pastor-shot-in-face-by-pepper-round-at-anti-ice-protest-speaks-out-10933811> >

Theme 2. Reformation Sunday

The Presbyterian Church (USA) is a major player in the *Reformed and Always Reforming* tradition. This means we believe God is still speaking. The Spirit is still moving and calling us to follow. What's more, it's our Reformed tradition that inspires us to make good trouble just as the Protestant Reformers spoke truth to power and corruption. We have been this way before.

Theme 3. Sweet Like Candy

Friday is Halloween. This morning, some of us have shown up in costume. Let's delight in our God-given imaginations, and let this sanctuary be filled with joy, and squeals of delight. After the service and coffee hour, at 11:30, we host a trick or treat party for the young and young at heart. Let's balance the sourness of this world with intentional sweetness.

So then, how do we juggle all of this tradition with current events—juggle the fear with the faith, the injustice with the joy? Whether this service is a beautiful mosaic—or a witch's brew—is up to each of us. I urge to bring your full self to worship this morning, warts and all. All of who you are is welcome in this place. Today, your church staff has costumed ourselves as The Addams Family, and I, Uncle Fester, would like to share with you, especially the children, a spooky poem for Halloween. The scene is an old dilapidated church social hall, with cobwebs and spiders—and a piano.

"Church Piano" by Michael Chitwood³

Like an invalid it took up the corner.

Banished from heaven by the electric lutes and oboe of the organ,
it went out of tune at the empty hands of children.

Children loved the grin under the dark, hinged lip.

They would lift and bang their tuneless jubilee.

"Bring me your quick," it sang.

The game was who could play and snatch
their hands back before the fall of the lid.

"Children, children," it called, "bring me your fingers."

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### *The Divine Dark*

"God is here in this place —the glory of the Lord is all around and fills this house!"<sup>4</sup> It's the claim that calls us to worship each week: that we are not alone, that the living God is with us, and that the glory of the Lord doesn't need perfect conditions but only for us to come together in reliance on the Holy Spirit. God meets us in our need.

Throughout scripture, we get images of God's glory: a burning bush, a pillar of fire; a choir of angels, a Bethlehem star. But what happens when glory doesn't come as light—but as darkness? Not field of flowers, but dark as midnight, thick, heavy.

In today's readings from 1 Kings, Solomon does build the house of the Lord. It is the product of an arduous process—negotiations with King Hiram, determining the precise placement of stone and cedar and cypress, the hammered gold, the priests processing the ark into the holy of holies, the awestruck congregation praising God. Then, around verse 10, something seems to go wrong. "A cloud filled the house of the Lord..." so that "the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud..." The priests were incapacitated. But Solomon in his wisdom calmed the people, reminding them how, some 400 years before, God had appeared to Moses in darkness (Exodus 10:22). Solomon knew how, in Deuteronomy 4:11, "You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness." Not in a brilliant stained-glass window, not in an Easter sunrise, but in a murky, undefined theology. Right there, in the thick of it, is where God chooses to dwell.

### *Into the Darkness*

This is a deeply countercultural message for those of us who have been taught to associate the presence of God with light and fabulous success. We've been groomed to believe in a fair-skinned, man's man of a God who grants military victory and blesses hard work with wealth. More recently added to the mistaken

<sup>3</sup> < <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?volume=164&issue=2&page=19> >

<sup>4</sup> Over the past weeks, we have been using Teri Peterson's litanies for the Narrative Lectionary, in association with the Bible Worm Podcast. < <https://www.biblewormpodcast.com/> > (October 11, 2025)

tradition: that blessed wealth will lead its holder to deep insight. Is that why people follow the billionaire strongmen who claim to have all the answers—they must be chosen by God? Theirs is worldly glory, the glory of a dominant culture. And worldly wealth the shallowest imitation of God's glory there is.<sup>5</sup>

But today's text, and our liturgy this morning, teaches of a different truth, the presence of God. Solomon builds a big shiny gilded temple and God's presence turns shows up to dim the sheen. God shows up *not* in the riches and rewards but with presence—deep, *divine* presence.

God shows up in the blackest midnight. And God is present with us in the thick darkness. Not in sunshine, but in fog. Not with a brilliant light bulb of insight, but in the dusky mystery of not knowing. That's where God is. *The Fog of Now*. I need God in the dark fog of 2025, because, let's be honest, some days it feels like evil is winning. Some days, it's too much: the slide toward fascism that wraps itself in the flag, the billionaires who change their political stripes with their moods, the cruelty toward immigrants, trans children and the unhoused people of God. The shattering of systems we depend on—education, justice, healthcare, the free press—all are being demolished like the East Wing. I wonder if justice is still possible in a world ordered by profit and might. And some days, I confess, I feel like those priests—unable to stand, incapacitated, old and in the way. The cloud is heavy. And it fills the whole place. But today's scripture says the cloud is where God is present. Some of God's best work is done in darkness.

### *Emmanuel*

That means God is in present, in the shelters and the encampments. God is present in detention centers, union halls and Home Depot parking lots. God is present in hospital rooms and morgues, protests and marches. God is present with the underpaid and the overworked. God is present in the mess of it all, in the places that look nothing like a temple—in the places that smell like a stable. God is there — in the thick of it. God is present in the ministry of the Rev. Jorge Bautista<sup>6</sup> and, *if not currently present in the masked thug* who pepper bombed Rev. Bautista God is certainly present that pepper bomber's mom. May he answer to someone's conscious if not his own.

### *Living Sanctuary*

And God is not calling us to build monuments to ourselves but rather to build communities of accountability, to recommit to the ongoing Reformation, and to refuse the violent ways of fascism. God's presence is not about superiority or approval. Today's scripture tells us even that God is not a relic for display. God is not a brand to protect. God is a living, breathing presence, unpredictable and with us to the end of the age.<sup>7</sup> *Our and About*. And our God is on the move. Back in the meeting tent, God wandered for centuries with the Jews who had been freed from the Narrow Place of Egyptian slavery. Later on, Jesus will wander the Galilee region with fishermen, making his way as an itinerant prophet, always on the move. After that, the Spirit of Pentecost will breathe life into the church, billowing the Word out into the world. Never static. Always reforming. On the move. We're not here in this beautiful space hoping God shows up; we're here to prepare ourselves to go out into the world, and follow God, moving and dancing the thick of it. The dark cloud is the fullness of God's presence.

So then, let's reform what church is. The church is not a citadel for the saintly. Please don't come to church if you're already perfect. (Been there. Exhausting.) The church is the gathering place for sinners and for people who desire more meaning. Worried about not being good enough? My friend, the Rev. Mitulski would tell you, "Every saint has a past, every sinner a future!" There are no perfect people in the kingdom of God.

Later on, when we sing "A Mighty Fortress is Our God"<sup>8</sup>, let's reclaim the radical resolve of Martin Luther. Let the dark clouds come. Bring 'em on. We will not be scared into submission. We will not shrink from the mystery of serving God. We will not wait for the smoke to settle before following Jesus. We will not sit in silence while injustice shoots peaceful protestors. God is in those clouds of pepper spray.

The glory of God fills this house and makes it more than a building. God's glory lives in the murkiness of you and me. We are the Body of Christ, all of us together with the Holy Spirit. Our salvation<sup>9</sup> is at hand. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Psalm 146; Matthew 19:15-22.

<sup>6</sup> < <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/priest-coast-guard-protest-pepper-ball-21118268.php> >

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>8</sup> < [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Mighty\\_Fortress\\_Is\\_Our\\_God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Mighty_Fortress_Is_Our_God) >

<sup>9</sup> Being "all together with the Holy Spirit" is the Early Church's definition of salvation.

