

Sermon given Feb. 19, 2016/11 Adar I 5776
T'rumah/T'zaveh

When services got postponed, I decided to add this week's portion to the sermon on *parasha T'rumah* I was to give a week ago. I have a special feeling for that *parasha*. It is the *Torah* portion I was assigned to speak about when I began my studies for the rabbinate in Israel and, coincidentally, it was the portion for my senior sermon 3 years after that.

Parasha T'rumah tells us that at God's instruction, Moses speaks to our ancestors: (Exod. 25:2) : tell the people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him.

A few verses later God says (Exod. 25 8), let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.

וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ
וְשִׁנְתִּיכֶם בְּתוֹכָם

It is in this *parasha* that we are thrilled by the description of gold and silver, the blue, purple and crimson dyes, the precise measurements and exacting work ordered by God for a moveable desert sanctuary.

Just as we are amazed by the richness and intricacy of these preparations, so others before us questioned the possibility of a former slave population having the material and skill to craft such a magnificent home for God. Many scholars say therefore, that this passage actually refers to King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem built much later when our ancestors were settled in the land of Israel with an established kingdom, living in relative peace.

This week, in some of the verses of portion *T'tzaveh*, we hear the instructions for the priestly garments and the intricacies of the breastpiece. I find that we take this *parasha* to heart as we have just purchased a beautiful breastplate for our saved scroll. And, yes, the breastplate is now found on the *Torah* in place of an ancient priestly class which no longer exists. I have the *chutzpah* to say I am especially thrilled with this breastplate because it is based on a traditional 17th century design I love and because it reflects our scroll's lineage.

Looking again at our verses, whatever the historical viability of the ancient sanctuary, it is the importance of its construction and portability that is at its center. This *Shabbat*, as I think of this ancient traveling ark and the response of those who went before us to bring the gifts of their hearts, I see us. Unlike other synagogues where a sanctuary always exists, we must create a space for *shabbat* each time we observe. We are called to work for *shabbat* and holidays; to build a sanctuary anew.

Not every generation is asked to shape sacred space but we rise up אִמָּץ וְחֹזֶק, with courage and strength, to do so. And so we have a special connection to this *parasha*, the wonderful idea of a portable ark.

Every time we are together the spirit of our congregational family fashions a holy space for God to dwell in: My recognition of and admiration for all of you to make it so.

Shabbat shalom