BUILD ME A SANCTUARY SO THAT I MAY DWELL AMONG YOU.
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This sermon was delivered from an outline (included below) a video of the sermon as delivered is available here: https://vimeo.com/37427261

- Last weekend the WSJ ran a cover story on their Week in Review section about how the decline of religion in the United States has contributed to a decline in community.
- The article written by Alain de Botton made the point that one of the great losses of our modern society is a sense of community. That we have replaced neighborliness with a ruthless self interest, that we pursue contact with each other for primarily individualistic ends
    - Financial gain
    - Social advancement
    - Romantic love
- Botton sees a correlation between this aggressive individualism and the decline of communal religious experience.
- He sees a return to communal religious life as the antidote to these societal ills, a response to the unmitigated individualism that is undermining our communities.
- In the words of noted sociologist Robert Putnam, "Too many people are bowling alone." Puttman and Botton both mean:
    - When we withdraw in to ever smaller and more narrow social circles we become strangers to one another this leads to a deficit of deep relationships and social capital that the more socially connected generations before us relied upon to meet life's challenges and celebrate life's joys.
- Take for example the typical secular Friday night ritual going to dinner and a movie – a microcosm of how isolated we have become from each other.
- A few years ago Sharon and I found ourselves without kids and me off the bima on a Friday night. We did something we have honestly never done before or since in our marriage, we went to a movie on a Friday night. I know shocking, radical – you'd think I ate bacon on Yom Kippur or something.
- We don't a live sheltered life by any means, but Friday for us is family night, its either shul or Shabbat dinner, sometimes both. But that Friday evening we entered the other sacred space in America, we went to the mall.
    - The whole world was there, all having the same experience – and yet everyone was essentially alone and isolated from each other.
- A few observations
    - I saw more congregants there than here, it was packed with people
    - The whole evening as you well know has its own rituals to it
        - Where to eat
        - Take the kids, don't take the kids

        - Getting the baby sitter
        - Do you go with another couple or by yourselves
        - Do you eat before or after the movie
        - And many more
    - Beyond casual greetings no one talked to each other.
        - We sat in a restaurant and had our own isolated experience.
        - We sat in the movie and did the same.
        - We walked the mall with frozen yogurt and again we were in our own world.
            - Everyone around us was having the same experience, engaged in the same if not identical ritual and yet we were separate and a part from each other.
            - It was a **collection** of people not a **community** of people.
- Juxtapose that with what we do here tonight, the other Friday night experience.
    - We come in alone or in couples but our experience is not isolated, rather it is interdependent.
    - What happens here what is created here exists in large measure because of the expectations we bring here
    - The invitation to greet with each other with "Shabbat Shalom" is an invitation to go deeper than just "hi how are you?", the point of the exchange is to connect with those around you.
    - If there was a dinner before or after services it would be the furthest experience from that of going to a restaurant. The impetus, indeed the mitzvah is to reach across the table to share the meal with others, to make friends of strangers or acquaintances.
        - Imagine for a moment if that was the how a restaurant worked, you made your reservations, then they sat you with total strangers and encouraged you to engage in conversation. That's what we do here at synagogue.
    - The prayer experience itself is not like a movie or a concert or a play. Though we struggle with that because it is maybe what is more familiar to us – the idea is that it is collaborative that the 'audience' (to use the metaphor) is also the actor.
        - Prayer comes from you and from here and God and holiness is found in the middle, in between.
    - In prayer we speak in the third person plural, we pray for this, we acknowledge that. We want healing, we want security, we yearn for peace, we crave acceptance of our prayers and supplications – together/collectively.
- **This is the great contribution of religion and in particular the synagogue to our society – it helps us transform strangers into friends.**
- As Botton points out religion serves two central needs that secular society has not been able to meet with any particular skill

    - The need to live together in harmonious communities, despite our deeply rooted selfish and sometimes violent impulses.
    - The need to cope with the paint that arises from professional failure, troubled relationships and the reality of our own decline and demise.
    - **Religion is a collection of occasionally ingenious concepts that attempt to assuage the most persistent and unattended ills of secular life.**
    - **RELIGION EXISTS TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER FOR SACRED PURPOSE – TO CONNECT AND DIRECT US TOWARD GREATER ENDS, THROUGH HONORABLE MEANS.**
- And so here we are tonight on Shabbat Treumah, the Sabbath that marks the building of the portable sanctuary by the ancient Israelites in the desert.
- We will read tomorrow morning, *vasuli mikdash vshohankti b'tocham*. God says, "Build me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among you."
- Why did God need us to build this place, God was with us in the desert, was with us at the red sea was with us at the mountain. Why build a sanctuary – if God is everywhere?
- **It is not for us to find God, no the purpose of this place of being here all together is so that God can find us.**
- Without this place we are isolated people roaming the malls of America, together but separate and I think for many also alone and lonely. But here we are or at least can aspire to be one people, of one heart, of one mind, of sacred purpose – connected and directed toward being more together than we could ever hope to be a part.
- That is the purpose of synagogue and the gift of religion – it creates community better than any other institution or experience I have ever known.