

TALK 3.5.26, PSALM 84, JOHN 14:15-27

FINDING GOD, FINDING A HOME, FINDING YOURSELF

'How lovely is your dwelling place', declares the Psalmist. And there's one thing that especially grabs his attention. That picture of a pair of swallows building a nest within God's temple. A simple, structure built from mud & hair & feathers, right next to the splendour of God's golden altar. A swallow, rearing her young in the most holy place among God's people. That's a picture of what it is like for us to find a home in God, within God's house. That tells us so much about God's welcome to us. Today & every day. Even those that are often overlooked & not seen as that important, find a place with God, near to God's heart. (So glad we have been able to install 2 Swift nest boxes on our building, donated by Jon & Helen Tripp & put in place by volunteers at the recent Working Party)...

God wants us to grow, to thrive. There is so much about blessing, favour & honour & receiving good things in this Psalm. God wants us to know abundant blessings. God wants us to live our fullest life. To grow into ourselves each day. To be more fully ourselves. When we find God, we truly find ourselves. I'm reminded again of the poems of the Catholic priest, Gerard Manley Hopkins, which I studied for my 'A' levels, many moons ago. Let me read to you part of one of his best known, shorter poems: 'God's Grandeur' – READ.

One of the things Hopkins talked about in terms of nature was 'inscape'. What did he mean by this 'inscape' ... ? It is the interior reality of every living thing. ('Inscape' like landscape). Only this was something within every living being, which can be observed from close study. Like the call of Jesus to 'consider well' birds & flowers, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount. This careful attention enables us understand our Creator, ourselves & the rest of creation. All of creation, reminds us of God's character & God's care for us. We find God by reading the Bible, of course. We find God by reading God's works in the world... We also find God through trouble & suffering...

Psalm 84 doesn't talk much of this. It is much more an up-beat Psalm, where the Psalmist focuses his eye on God's wonders & blessings. But even here, he talks about life being like going through the 'Valley of Baka'. This was a dry & waterless place, where there seems no hope of life or flourishing. But those who travel with God, miraculously find - not only springs of water, but pools of

water along the way. This has been my experience, the experience of Carey church & I'm sure this echoes your experience too.

This week I came across a story in the Daily Prayer Book of the Northumbria Community, which is worth re-telling here. It's a story of a group of women, who agreed to meet together & read through the Sermon on the Mount together. Over the weeks they met, they got to understand the words of Jesus better. They got to know each other better too. And it gradually emerged that one of these women had experienced a particularly awful trauma. (One of her daughters had taken her own life)... Her life seemed to fall apart overnight. Her husband retreated into his own grief. And yet, here she was, turning up to this group regularly, apparently 'vibrant with life & shining with faith'. So, the other women asked her to share her story with them & she agreed.

Here's what she said, quoted in the Daily Prayer book: 'In the beginning, I felt as if half my chest was missing. And where my heart had been was a jagged hole. Many days I could not speak. Some days I could barely breathe. But I am not one to run away. Like the persistent widow in Jesus' parable, I had to confront this thing head-on. So I beat & beat on the door until God answered. One day, when I was ready to hear this, God opened the door. God said to me: 'I will not heal this jagged hole, but I will fill it with my glory'. With those words, life began again. God helped her to re-build her family. And now she helps troubled teens at risk of suicide. Alleluia! No experience is wasted in God's economy. 'Blessed are those whose strength is in God, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.... Blessed are those who trust in you, O LORD'.

God is found by those who look. By those who stay attentive, ready to listen for God's voice. Those who 'set their hearts on pilgrimage'. Now here, we may well relate to the question of Judas in John 14... Judas says in effect, 'It's great that you want to reveal yourself to us, your friends, by why don't you reveal yourself generally to the world?'...

That's because God's saving revelation is intensely personal. God has specific messages to say to each of us, not intended for everyone. God's Holy Spirit has a 'be-spoke', individually tailored ministry. When the risen Jesus spent time with his disciples, he took time to speak to each one personally. Yes, he also delivered more general messages to the whole group, like the Great Commission at the end of Matthew's gospel, for example.

But make no mistake, God has something particular & specific that needs to be shared with you & no-one else. These messages might be shared with a wider audience, later on. But as Jesus says here in John 14, just before his death on the cross: 'Anyone who loves me, my Father & I will come to them & make our home with them'... What an amazing & glorious truth! Too easily glossed over. When the Psalmist says: 'How lovely is your dwelling place', we can now say: 'God's dwelling place is right here ...!' How lovely it is to know God, to spend time with God in the most intimate way, in the innermost place'. Thanks be to the Father for the good news of Jesus, the good news of God's Spirit. God comes to US. The LORD meets with US personally; God makes his home with US & speaks to us of his undying love. Alleluia!

In finding God we 'come to our senses' & find our true selves. Our true home. It's significant that the Psalmist talks here, not of Israel, but of Jacob. He uses an individual name, not a collective name. And immediately after mentioning Jacob, he uses the term 'Selah', which is often thought to denote a pause, a time of silence to reflect. So, this silence would have given his audience time to recollect Jacob's experience. Time to be reminded of how God specifically met with this one man. How God gave this one man a specific blessing. Jacob, a dodgy character & an outcast from his family, who finds his true family with God. A man who struggles with God, but who overcomes & is finally restored to his natural family. Alleluia!

Because God has shown us his love in Jesus. Because we love Jesus in return and live in his love, we can hear his voice. We can receive the messages he has for us. We can be 'at home with God' each day. We can know God's love every day. And God, by the Holy Spirit, will teach us each new things. God's Spirit will remind us of all that God has said. Of all the wonderful counsel of God. PTL!

As we approach Pentecost, we can know that this is the time that God is drawing close to us. And that we can draw close to God. As we approach Pentecost, what better time to reflect upon God's promises about our Advocate, the Holy Spirit. The One who will help us to navigate the difficult terrain of this world.

In three week's time we look forward to three people being baptise here on Pentecost Sunday ... Something special about the number three here... ! And we share together in this journey. We celebrate the fact that Mark, Ryan, Zsolt

have heard & responded to the call to be baptised. And similarly we rejoice that others: Mary, Chima & Chinonso have responded to the call to come into membership here at Carey. And we journey with them, in our journey of faith together, as we prepare for this special day, when we will join in celebrating the birth of the church, and what it means to find new life in Christ. A true home in God, with his people.

So, as we draw closer to Pentecost, how are you going to make time to be alone with God this week? When will you open yourself to receive the multiple blessings of God? Where, this week, will you receive the peace of Jesus?. Make no mistake God wants to give you a peace which transcends understanding. A peace the world cannot give & cannot understand. Today might be that time to meet with God, to hear the voice of Jesus. But make no mistake, each day we have this glorious opening to heaven, for a personal audience with God. Paul encourages us with these words: 'Make the most of every opportunity, for the days are evil...'

Jesus says here, specifically, "I do not give you as the world gives"... How does the world give? The world gives with conditions, with TNCs. The world gives with strings attached. The world 'gives', expecting something burdensome & difficult in return. Not so with our God... In Christ, God gives freely. By the Holy Spirit, God gives abundantly. And as a Father with his child, he doesn't look for an immediate 'return' from his investment. God waits. God is patient with us. God simply wants the best for his children. Yes, he hopes for gratitude. He hopes His children to live fruitful lives, but this is not why he gives to us. God gives because God cannot help but do this. God lives to share multiple blessings with us. This is the very heart of God. Glory be to God!...

Let us spend some time in quiet, waiting to receive from God this morning... God by His Spirit 'will teach us all things' & will guide us into all truth. 'How lovely is your dwelling place'... How glorious to spend time with the Living God. Let's be quiet... In a moment there may also be an opportunity for people to share something for our encouragement... Something to strengthen us for these difficult days...

'Be still & wait for the LORD... be strong & take heart & wait for the LORD'.

TIME OF QUIET

TIME OF SHARING

SONG – THE LORD’S MY SHEPHERD