

## AT HOME WITH GOD

**Sermon preached in St Peter's Cathedral, Hamilton**

**By Jennifer Stuart on 23 August 2009**

'Show me the way to go home,

I'm tired and I want to go to bed...' do you know the song?

There is no place like home, I think we have been born with a 'homing instinct', it's fun to visit other places but it is always good to return home.

Robert Frost is purported to have said, 'home is where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in!' Stated more positively home is where you belong. Home is where you feel most comfortable, you feel grounded, centred somehow, you are relaxed and at ease. You can put your feet up and sigh, 'ahhh.' Home is where love is. A loving home is a place of rock solid security, a stronghold of shelter and safety. A place where you have the confidence to move freely, to breathe deeply, to share dreams and to think aloud. Home is probably the most beautiful place in the world, it may be humble but it is home.

Our homes nourish our souls, and we make an effort to create a home that reflects something of who we are, a place that is pleasing to us, where we can be refreshed and recreated. I love living with beautiful things. Reg Nicholson in his sermon last week spoke about beauty and he quoted Plato who said, 'the contemplation of beauty causes the soul to grow wings.' And so we surround ourselves with the colours we like, music that soothes and inspires us, with possessions that are significant to us, and in which we take pleasure.

Solomon acknowledges that no house on earth can contain God, however he prays that God's name may dwell there. He prays also for the foreigner who comes to this house, that they may have their prayers answered. The house of the Lord was to be a place of provision for the stranger. A home away from home as it were.

One of the dominant images in Psalm 84, is the image of 'home,' conveyed in the words, *dwelling place*, *home* and *nest*. 'Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself,' I love those words. The holiest of places gives room for a 'nursery' to one of the smallest, and possibly not always most welcome of creatures. 'Even the sparrow finds a home...' Do you recall Jesus' words, 'you are of more value than many sparrows.'

The gospel reading opens with Jesus encouraging his disciples to abide in him, just as he will 'abide in them.' Such abiding affirms the home we find with God, in our relationship with Jesus and with one another. We abide in him, but the image is taken one step further, God abides in us, we are the God's dwelling place! We find our true

home in Him and He finds a home in you and me. Solomon was quite correct when he said of the temple, as beautiful as it was, 'even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built.' It is flesh and blood that comprises the temple of the Holy Spirit. Imagine that, God deigns to take up residence within each of us! And the Psalmist says 'how lovely is your dwelling place!' I need to process that thought some more...

I love the image of the pregnant woman. She is a constant witness to life. She carries a life other than her own wherever she goes. I am sure that Christ would have us pregnant with his life in much the same way.

You will probably be aware of these words of St Augustine, 'You (God) have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.' We have this God-shaped vacuum within, a space that nothing, that nobody else can fill. I think this is the essence of that 'homing instinct' we are sometimes aware of. It's a sense of quest, a yearning, for something we don't always understand. I think life is a search for this 'something.' Whatever it is, it touches on meaning, purposefulness, fulfilment, and beauty. Life is often likened to a journey, a pilgrimage. We are in a foreign land, travelling through that 'valley of Baca,' a barren desert place, where we may even feel abandoned by God, a place of sorrow and tears. We feel twinges of nostalgia, it's as if we were born trying to remember where our true home is.

We are in good company for the scriptures tell us that Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Sarah, Moses and others confessed that they were 'strangers and foreigners on the earth.' They made it clear that they were seeking a homeland, they desired a better country and the scriptures tell us that 'God has prepared a city for them.'

Jesus gave us the wonderful promise, 'in my Father's house there are many dwelling places... I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.' However the promise of 'home' is not only something that we have to wait for at some time in the future, it is something we can experience here and now.

You are probably aware of the scripture, 'Listen, I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come into you and eat with you, and you will eat with me. We will share fellowship together.' This is often used to encourage a non-believer to open themselves to the Christian faith; it was actually written to the Christian church of Laodicea, or Pamukkale, in present day Turkey. God is saying, continue opening your heart's door and make me increasingly at home there.

As we do that we find that home is wherever we hang our hat. It's a home within that we carry with us – it is the presence of God.

‘How lovely is your dwelling place O Lord of Hosts.’ Where there is beauty there is God and we hear the Psalmist declare that those who dwell in the home that God creates within go from strength to strength, even the valley and desert places become springs and pools of water; there is genuine happiness, for God bestows favour and honour, and no good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.

Does this sound super-spiritual and highly impractical? Begin to relate every circumstance of your life to a loving God, for through these circumstances God is planting something in your soul. You will begin to realize that the love of God is seeking you in every situation for your good.

Your home, your life will increasingly be furnished with beautiful things, with a sense of well-being, with the knowledge that God is in His heaven, enthroned in your heart and all is well with the world. The contemplation of God, the contemplation of beauty will cause your soul to grow wings.

Jesus said, ‘the kingdom of God is inside you and all around you. Not in mansions of wood and stone. Split a piece of wood and you will find me, lift a stone and I am there.’ Grace is everywhere!

An old friend and mentor would often finish his sermons by saying, ‘keep the faith.’ That is what I would encourage you to do, for in the words of the Psalmist, ‘happy is everyone who trusts in the Lord.’