

# Sermon

## God's Dwelling Place

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, August 22, 2021

13<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

### Prayer for Illumination:

**Lord God, we gather on this Lord's day and we feel the yearning and restlessness which draws us to gather in the hope of a word from you. We live in a mindless world, in a restless society, and we long to know you, and to know the joy of being with you.**

**We hear the wisdom of the Psalmist "Happy are those whose strength is in you,**

**in whose heart are the highways to Zion..."**

**So speak to us this day. Give us a word that lasts amid the many changing words of our generation. — We are here to listen and take to heart all that you intend to say. Amen.**

*Eph. 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. 15 As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. 16 With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

*Eph. 6:18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.*

*Psa. 84:0 To the leader: according to The Gittith. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.*

*1 How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O LORD of hosts!  
2 My soul longs, indeed it faints  
for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and my flesh sing for joy  
to the living God.*

*Psa. 84:3 Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young,  
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,  
my King and my God.  
4 Happy are those who live in your house,  
ever singing your praise. Selah*

*Psa. 84:5 Happy are those whose strength is in you,  
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.  
6 As they go through the valley of Baca  
they make it a place of springs;  
the early rain also covers it with pools.  
7 They go from strength to strength;  
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.*

*Psa. 84:8 O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;  
give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah  
9 Behold our shield, O God;  
look on the face of your anointed.*

*Psa. 84:10 For a day in your courts is better*

- than a thousand elsewhere.*
- I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God*  
*than live in the tents of wickedness.*
- 11 *For the LORD God is a sun and shield;*  
*he bestows favor and honor.*  
*No good thing does the LORD withhold*  
*from those who walk uprightly.*
- 12 *O LORD of hosts,*  
*happy is everyone who trusts in you.*

**I. Saint Augustine of Hippo —**

*“Lord, You have made us for yourself, and our hearts remain restless until they find their rest in you.”*

— *Confessions, i. 1.*

- A. Ever since I encountered this sentence in Augustine nearly 30 years ago I have known the truth of it.**
- B. As a young adult, trying to understand my own restlessness, I was seeking for a way to give my life meaning.**
  - 1. Through academic success**
  - 2. Through entrepreneurial exploits**
  - 3. Through a series of failed relationships**
- C. But through it all I remained *restless***
  - 1. ill-at-ease**
  - 2. dissatisfied**
  - 3. persistently under the feeling that I was missing something.**
  - 4. Emotionally, and psychologically — Homeless**
- D. A *brief* encounter with Augustine’s *Confessions* gave me my first clue out of the maze of my life.**
  - 1. This quote is in the first section of the first chapter of Augustine’s work.**

2. **The honest truth is, I read far enough to encounter this sentence and I put Augustine down for another 10 years.**
3. **But like the children in the fairytale I had the first breadcrumb which would begin to guide me back home.**

*“Lord, You have made us for yourself, and our hearts remain restless until they find their rest in you.”*

- E. **Ever since Augustine first penned this, Christians have understood that it describes the journey of our life as pilgrims of faith.**

**II. Psalm 84 is categorized by biblical scholars as one of the “Songs of Zion” — that is it is a pilgrimage song meant to beckon people of faith “home” to Zion - to Jerusalem, and to the deeper faith which pilgrims seek.**

- A. **The Psalmist is inviting us home to the Temple, which serves as the central motif of the Psalm, but in very short order the psalm expands the location of “home” to include not only the Temple, but the whole of life.**

1. **The highways to Zion — presumably the *via maritimas* and the highway of the king which ran down the Jordan rift valley**

- a. **Have *now* become highways of the heart:**

*Psa. 84:5 Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.*

- B. **The valley of Baca — literally “valley of weeping”**
  1. **Has become a place where the pilgrim steps from strength to strength as they would step on stones crossing a stream.**



**C. Indeed . . .**

- 1 *How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O LORD of hosts!*
- 2 *My soul longs, indeed it faints  
for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and my flesh sing for joy  
to the living God.*

**IV. The Temple in Jerusalem which the Psalmist sings about is gone, of course.**

- A. Destroyed by the Roman army in the year 70.**
- B. Only the western wall of the Temple Mount remains**
- C. Pilgrims both Jewish and Christian still heed Psalm 84 and come to pray there.**

**V. When Sarah and I were in Jerusalem last March**

- A. I had a free day to do as I pleased**
- B. Went to St. Ann's church**
  - 1. It is the start of the *Via Dolorosa* and so is visited by nearly every pilgrim who ever goes to Jerusalem.**

March 7, 2018

Jerusalem — St. Ann's Church

I have returned to this holy-place alone.

I love the gentleness & kindness of the white-robed friar who welcomes pilgrims to this place. He reflects kindness and compassionate hospitality in every interaction. It is beautiful.

Group after group of pilgrims come to the steps in front of the altar and sing to God and in honor of Mary. Many pilgrims. Many Languages. Some make gentle music. Some shout aloud. Some contemplative; some celebrative. Asians, Europeans, South Americans, Africans, and who knows where else?

There is a dove which keeps flying in and out — up to the transept and back out the main entrance. It seems like it is flying in with each group and flying out as they go. I imagine that it is a sign of the Holy Spirit which travels in community with these pilgrims.

After a while I notice that the dove returns with a bit of straw or a twig and I realize it is making a home in this holy place — I am a bit jealous.

*Psalm 84*

- 1        *How lovely is your dwelling place,  
          O LORD of hosts!*
- 2        *My soul longs, indeed it faints  
          for the courts of the LORD;  
          my heart and my flesh sing for joy  
          to the living God.*
- 3        *Even the sparrow finds a home,  
          and the swallow a nest for herself,  
          where she may lay her young,  
          at your altars, O LORD of hosts,  
          my King and my God.*
- 4        *Happy are those who live in your house,  
          ever singing your praise. Selah*

## **VI. Ben Johnson — “Where you put your God has enormous implications for how you experience God.”**

**A. If our life before God is, in essence, the pilgrimage “home” to be where our hearts are no longer restless because they have found their rest in the Almighty — Then where is it that God dwells exactly?**

**1. God as *both* wholly-other (*a la* Barth and Isaiah 6, Ephesians’ “heavenly places”)**

***and***

**2. inside of us (*a la* Jesus in John, and numerous voices from early Christendom).**

**† John 14:23**

*“Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”*

**And then just a few verses later: John 15:4**

*Abide in me as I abide in you.*

**B. The Bible is content to tell it *both ways* and to refuse to nail *one* down as *the* truth.**

**C. God is both “out there” in all the ways that astonish us in nature, and in worship.**

**AND**

**God is “in here” patiently waiting for us to notice.**

**D. The life of faith is a life in which God inhabits our world surrounds us like air — impinges on our thoughts — is full of gentle invitations, and awaits our attention.**

## **VII. How stunning that the God who Isaiah describes as:**

*Is. 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple.*

**A. That God, “high and lofty” also deigns to abide in us!**

**B. Saint John Chrysostom (347 - 407 CE)**

*“Find the door of your heart, and you will discover it is the door of the kingdom of God.”*

**C. So I invite you to join your pastor is paying attention to the restlessness in your life.**

**1. It is the key to discerning where the Spirit of God is leading you.**

*“Our hearts remain restless until we find our rest own God.”*

# A Pilgrim's Prayer - PHL

Lead me, Lord,<sup>1</sup>  
gently,<sup>2</sup> pervasively, irresistibly, increasingly,  
so that I walk my pilgrim way steadily,  
and find the place of my resurrection.<sup>3</sup>

Lead me, Lord,  
so that I neither dally nor disobey,  
nor turn aside, nor stand still, nor  
stumble, nor turn back in loyalty  
to old gods who will not bless me.<sup>4</sup>

Lead me, Lord,  
as a felt Presence,  
as a constant companion,<sup>5</sup>  
as a counselor in perplexity,<sup>6</sup>  
as my first, fast, last friend.<sup>7</sup>

Lead me, Lord,  
by the restlessness of spiritual longing<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> You find this phrase only in (but throughout) the Book of Psalms. — Psalms 5:8; 25:5; 27:11; 31:3; 43:3; 61:2; 119:35; 139:10; 139:24; 143:10

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

<sup>3</sup> "[This] understanding of journeying is in itself so rich and so significant. It is *peregrinatio*, seeking quest, adventure, wandering, exile — it is ultimately a journey . . . to find the place of my resurrection, the resurrected self, the self that I might hope to be, to become the true self in Christ." The Celtic Way of Prayer p. ix-x by Ester de Waal

<sup>4</sup> I'm thinking here of the many times in the flight from Egypt when the people of God longed to return to enslavement over the risky and uncertain life of following God in the wilderness.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 28:20b "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." AND John 14:16 "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."

<sup>6</sup> I borrow this phrase from the liturgy of the Marriage rite in which we pray that God make the spouses a counselor in perplexity for one another. John 14:26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

<sup>7</sup> I, of course, have borrowed here the famous final phrase of the poem of Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Lantern Out of Doors* the last stanza of which reads, "Christ minds: Christ's interest, what to avow or amend

There, éyes them, heart wánts, care haúnts, foot fóllows kind,  
Their ránsom, théir rescue, ánd first, fást, last friénd."

<sup>8</sup> I am thinking here of Augustine's well-known prayer: "God, you have made us such that our hearts remain restless until we find our rest in you."

by the hope of finding my true home,<sup>9</sup>  
by the yearning of a hungry heart.

Lead me, Lord,  
by grace to gratitude,  
by gratitude to generosity of spirit,  
by generosity to mercy,  
that I may cultivate a compassionate heart.

Lead me, Lord,  
through your loving embrace,  
so that I do not forget or fall away,  
but remain steadfast and loyal,  
joyful and true on my journey with you.  
*Amen.*

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<sup>9</sup> This phrase was inspired by a comment written by my mother in her journal on a page in which she was describing her own spiritual awakening: "I was always in church, but never spiritually at home. My spiritual home was in my own solitude and in communion. I know a lot about God but I do not know the Lord." 1999