

**Circuit Service 30 October 2022 – Prepared by Rev. Martin Beukes**

**Theme: Where is God?**

**Call to Worship** Psalm 27:1-4

The Lord is my light and my salvation—  
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life—  
of whom shall I be afraid?

When the wicked advance against me  
to devour me,

it is my enemies and my foes  
who will stumble and fall.

Though an army besiege me,  
my heart will not fear;

though war break out against me,  
even then I will be confident.

One thing I ask from the Lord,  
this only do I seek:

that I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
all the days of my life,

to gaze on the beauty of the Lord  
and to seek him in his temple.

Let us pray. Loving God, who make our hearts seek you, we offer you all the concerns of our daily lives. Hold our fears and anxieties, our struggles and pain, so we are able to give you our attention as we worship you now. Speak to us of your love and open our eyes to see that you are right here with us now. Amen.

**Song:** STF 83 Praise, my soul, the King of heaven - Henry Francis Lyte (1793–1847)

[Praise, my soul, the King of heaven Hymn - Westminster Abbey - YouTube](#)

1	Praise, my soul, the King of heaven; to his feet thy tribute bring. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like thee his praise should sing? Praise him! Praise him! Praise the everlasting King!	3	Father-like, he tends and spares us; well our feeble frame he knows; in his hands he gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes. Praise him! Praise him! Widely as his mercy flows.
2	Praise him for his grace and favour to his people in distress; praise him, still the same for ever, slow to chide, and swift to bless. Praise him! Praise him! Glorious in his faithfulness.	4	Angels in the height, adore him; ye behold him face to face; sun and moon, bow down before him, dwellers all in time and space. Praise him! Praise him! Praise with us the God of grace!

**Confessions:**

Gracious Lord Jesus, we praise you for your goodness and love towards us. Through no efforts of our own, you have invited us be part of God's family. As much as we want to worship you with all of our lives, and live to your glory, we know that we are easily distracted by the everyday needs in our lives. Forgive us Lord, for we have not always loved as you have loved us. Forgive us Lord, for we have not always done the things you have called us to do. Forgive us Lord, for we have not loved ourselves as you have created us. In the quiet, we bring you our failures in search of your mercy.

*Silence...*

## Say the **Lord's Prayer**

Hear the words that Jesus said to those who came looking for him, "Your sin is forgiven, go in peace!" Amen.

**Readings:** Exodus 25: 1-9 and John 1:1-5 and 9-14

### **Sermon:**

Have you ever wondered to yourself, 'Where is God?' We ask it when life is tough, when our mood is low, and especially when life is overwhelming. Where is God is a good question, and the answer starts with camping!

I love camping... I don't know if it is because I spent a lot of time camping at watersides and fishing with my Dad when I was young or if it is because there is something rather primal about it which appeals to our souls. Maybe we are created to be that closely connected to nature, rather than cooped up inside concrete buildings all the time. Our souls enjoy the closeness to nature of camping.

So, some years ago, I wanted to go camping and Nicole, my wife, is a rather reluctant camper. In fact, the first time I asked her if we should, I believe the answer was something very close to 'Over my dead body!' Well that proved incorrect and she now loves the being close to nature that camping offers us.

For us camping is just a bit of fun and an opportunity to recharge our batteries, but for some people camping is how they live. Whether that is a homeless person in a first world country, or a migrant shepherd in the Middle East or Africa. Some people's lives are lived in temporary, movable homes, or tents. Jesus would have known this, and a lot of people in Jesus' time would have lived this way. But no one understood this better than the Hebrews fleeing slavery and Pharaoh.

My brother-in-law, while rather enjoying the Harry Potter films, never finished watching them. He calls the 7th film the never ending camping trip because almost nothing happens except the trio moving their tent from here, to there, to there, repeatedly. It frustrates him so much he couldn't be bothered to watch the 8th film. But you know who lived through the original, super frustrating, never ending camping trip? The Hebrews escaping from slavery in Egypt.

The Hebrews spent 40 years in the wilderness, learning to live with God and one another the way God wanted them to. They lived in tents, they moved around, and at no other point in their history was God closer to them. Why? First God led them into the wilderness to learn to live free, and then God told them to build a special tent where God's presence resided. The special tent was right amongst the tents where they lived so God was right there among them. They called the tent of God's presence the 'Tabernacle.'

Because of the 40 years in the wilderness people of Jewish faith today pause each year for a week to remember this time. For the week they will live in temporary shelters normally built of tree branches but often just a tent on their balcony. This feast of tabernacle, or festival of booths as it is most often translated in English Bibles, is a time of *remembering the closeness of God's presence* to the Hebrews, as God led them out of slavery physically and spiritually. No surprise this is one of the most important moments in the year because it remembers the time God was closest to them, leading them to freedom through the desert!

So God was with the Hebrews in the Tabernacle, and why our psalm for today sings 'I want to dwell in the house ('tent') of the Lord forever'.

We jump from the command in Exodus to build a tent for God's presence to John where God builds his own tent. We read in the NIV of the Bible that God 'made a dwelling' among humanity. This is one of those unfortunate occasions where trying to make the English easy to read and understand loses the true meaning. The Greek here reads 'God tabernacles among them' or 'God pitched a tent.' We are supposed to realise that Jesus is now more than the tent of God's presence way back when. Jesus is God's presence walking and talking and living among us! God incarnate, God 'taking on flesh', a very different kind of tabernacle to the one made out of Hippo hides and Cedar wood.

These are of course John's ideas, but did Jesus say the same thing. Seven times in John, we find Jesus answering a question about who he is with the words 'I am he.' Which is some sort of grammatical nonsense. We would never speak like that. Here again what Jesus is actually saying is hard to translate because he keeps saying 'I am, it's me.' Every time he is asked if he is from God he answers 'I am, it's me!' As a result sometime in English it is written I am he. Which is also horrible grammar. Because it should really be written I AM in all capitals, like we do LORD in the Old Testament.

In Jesus' day Jews spoke Aramaic, a form of Hebrew, but would never use the name of God. Instead the priests at the altar would say 'Ani Hu,' literally I am, it's me. Exactly like Jesus answers 7 times when he is questioned in John's Gospel. This is why when Jesus is arrested in the garden of Gethsemane and they ask where is Jesus, they step back and fall down, because he answers them 'Ani Hu.' Jesus says '*I am God tabernacled right here before you.*' I may have fallen over too.

So God was present to us directly in Jesus. But what about when Jesus left us?

When Jesus tells the disciples he is leaving to return to the Father, they are not happy. They have known the close presence of God in Jesus all this time and the thought of Jesus leaving them is too much. And so Jesus says to them: John 16:5b-7 "None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' 6 Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. 7 But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

The word here for *Advocate* means someone who offers you wise counsel, or who argues your case for you. It is someone who stands by your side always, even, or maybe especially, when you are in the wrong! Jesus is promising the Holy Spirit will never leave us. Even if Jesus' body, his tent dies, or ascends, still the Spirit is with us.

So I finish with one of the most beautiful, and yet horribly misused lines of scripture. Among a list of things we should not do, because it demeans God's gift of our bodies, Paul writes this in 1 Corinthians 16:9 "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?"

Or maybe to make it clearer, '*Don't you know that the Holy Spirit lives within you as a gift from God?*'

So, where is God? God chooses to live among and reveal himself to people. God chooses to come and live our life among us for a time. And God chooses to build a tent within us if only we welcome the Holy Spirit to build a home there.

**Hymn:** STF 55 Immortal, invisible, God only wise - Walter Chalmers Smith (1824–1908)

[HALIFAX MINSTER-IMMORTAL, INVISIBLE, GOD ONLY WISE - YouTube](#)

1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes, most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days, almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.	we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree, and wither and perish; but naught changeth thee.
2 Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light, nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might — thy justice like mountains high soaring above thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.	4 Great Father of glory, pure Father of light, thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight; all praise we would render: O help us to see 'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.
3 To all life thou givest, to both great and small; in all life thou livest, the true life of all;	5 Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes, most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days, almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

**Intercessions:**

*Think over the last week or two. What things have happened for which you wish to give thanks to God? What has happened for which you wish to ask God's aid, guidance, or intervention? In the quiet, offer your prayers to God.*

Lord God, creator of all things, you gaze at your creation and declare that it is good. Hear our prayers for healing, guidance, and hope. We look with expectation to the restoration of all things in your presence. Amen.

**Song:** STF 186 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! - Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)

[Tell out my soul \(in full\) - YouTube](#)

1 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice; tender to me the promise of his word; in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.	3 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might! Powers and dominions lay their glory by; proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight, the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.
2 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name! Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done; his mercy sure, from age to age the same; his holy name — the Lord, the Mighty One.	4 Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word! Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord to children's children and for evermore!

**Benediction:**

The amazing grace of the Master, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you. Evermore. Amen

**Go in peace, In the power of the Spirit,  
to live and work to God's praise and glory. Amen**