

How Lovely Is Your Dwelling Place

Psalm 84

A Thought Experiment: Fountain of Youth

From Confirmation class: what if in the stables was the fountain of youth?

And that you were invited to go and freely drink?

What if you arrived and found:

- Music playing that you did not like?
- People different from you?
- A custodian who was a bit of an idiot?

Would it stop you? Of course not: first things first.

Today: using this thought experiment when it comes to worship

In particular: the Lord's Supper

What is it that we are receiving?

We confess: The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ

Given and shed for the forgiveness of sins: Is this true?

If it is, it has profound implications for our spirituality of worship.

All of us naturally think that worship is what we give God

Something that we have to do

We might then think it is primarily about expressing our faith

Or about having an ecstatic experience of the divine.

When that's the case, we can easily become cold toward worship

Especially when we look inside and don't feel faith or joy.

But worship is primarily about God serving us

And God bringing us together in a particular place with particular people

Who are different from us

To grow us in love, and to fashion us into a community

So that we don't walk alone.

That is a witness not only to the world, but to the whole cosmos.

In the psalm today: a psalm of one who is served by God in worship

The place is important; the place is loved

But the one who serves in the place: God

God is the source of joy

Today we'll go through the psalm: let's hear how it starts.

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!

Dwelling place: literally your tents or tabernacles

The language of I John: the Son of God becoming flesh

And tabernacling with us.

Lord of hosts: does this ring any bells? The communion liturgy

Scholars are of the opinion: a reference to the temple

And in particular the Ark of the Covenant

And the presence of God for his people there.

So there is a focus on the place: the temple

And this focus exists because of who makes himself graciously present there

God himself: that's why the psalmist can sing these words:

My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

For the place, for the person: a lively God who acts in grace.

And there is a simple picture of the inclusion of nature given: **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.**

Birds: beautiful, but noisy and dirty:

An application of one pastor I heard: like children! Welcome...

The psalmist goes on: **Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.**

This can sound boring: sitting on a cloud... who would want to do that?

Until we think about what this means.

I saw a great movie during the week: A Hidden Life

I want to talk with people about it: that's a version of praising the movie

Enjoying it more deeply: if that's how we enjoy the creation

Then think what it means to enjoy the creator: to lift our gaze.

C S Lewis is a writer who is especially sensitive to this: especially in Narnia

The place and the person: Aslan...

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

First of all: 'Zion': the place of the temple [The Matrix]

The goal of the pilgrimage gives strength to those who walk

Next, picture the imagery

The pilgrims by their presence bring refreshment to the land

Those who live with their lives ordered to God

Refresh those who are thirsty for what is good, what is true, what is beautiful.

The psalm then changes focus again: **O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed.**

Your anointed: your Messiah, your Christ: in the first place: the king

But we could read it as the Son of David: Christ Jesus himself

He is the one who shields us from harm and danger

He is the one who brings us into what is good, to what brings peace.

This is why the psalmist can say: **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.**

It's better to live in a humble worldly state and be with God

Than to be wealthy, or connected, or powerful.

Dante: Piccarda: In His will is our peace: God denies no good thing for joy

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favour and honour. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.

As Jesus assures us, our heavenly Father knows what we need

And will hold no truly good thing back from us

We might pause at the words 'those who walk uprightly'

For who of us can claim that we have not sinned?

There is one who has walked uprightly, the Lord's anointed, Jesus
It is in him that we find God's favour
And that's why the final words of the psalm are such good news:
○ Lord of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.
Who looks to you for all that is good, for all that is true
For all that is beautiful

Dear people of St Paul's:
This building has been loved by you:
For a good reason: it is where God has served you in worship
But by the power of his word God will serve you
As you moved to Riversdale Rd
Your pilgrimage there will bring refreshment
It will be a pilgrimage of joy
Your Lord is not absent from you
But is present for you by his word with your brothers and sisters
To be received in faith: trust in him
And you will be blessed by God.