

## Where Does God Live?

*I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word ... saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" (2 Samuel 7:6-7)*



Where does God live? We and our spiritual forebears have attached great significance to the places where we presume God dwells. From Solomon's temple to Saint Peter's. From Canterbury Cathedral to St. Mark's. Today's readings address this question of where God lives. Their collected wisdom speaks to a core truth of the Incarnation. And how, as Christmas draws near, we might grow in our understanding of who we are as Christians and as a church.

In the reading from the Old Testament, King David is feeling a bit sheepish. Though Israel's new king has settled into a nice big house, God is still living in a tent. But God, speaking through the prophet Nathan, is pretty clear - having a fine house to live in is not a priority for him. God journeys with his people. God dwells behind curtains and under tents, not some house of cedar. Packing light, for tomorrow may bring a long road.

Jesus said, *"Foxes have holes; and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has no where to lay his head."* (Luke 9:58) From the earliest years, Christians were known as People of the Way. We didn't have churches. We broke bread in homes. We follow a God who is on the move. We journey with him and each other through this vale of tears, joining Jesus bringing healing grace to all who suffer, restoring all creation to wholeness.

God is less concerned with living in a house of cedar than making an eternal home for his people. Jesus assures us that *"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?"* (John 14:2) A house that is an everlasting kingdom.

The final verses of Paul's letter to the Romans stand among today's lections as a witness to the power of the proclamation of Jesus Christ, and the Good News made known in the prophetic writings. God lives in the scriptures. God lives in our sharing of its message. In the acts of kindness and mercy we perform in Christ's name. People of the Way, pack light, and bring a Bible.

In the Gospel, Gabriel tells Mary that God has chosen to become flesh within her womb. Behold the mystery of the Incarnation. A young woman who lives in and for God will now have God living in her. A swelling, kicking fetus dependent on the nutrition of her body and the love in her pure heart. The fragile and precious infant of Mary and Joseph. God lives in Mary's womb. God lives in a Holy Family. As the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God is loving relationship. So it makes sense that God chooses to dwell in loving mutual dependency with God's creatures.

And as Rev. Mieke shared with us last week, God chose to live not with a family in a big cedar house, but a family on the edge of the empire, on the economic and social

margins of power. Not even sanctioned as a proper family by their own religion and community. God lives in the fragility of life. In its brokenness. Its many injustices. My friends, when we question where God is in the messiness and pain of this life, may we draw comfort from the Hope of the World growing strong by Mary's womb.

So where does God live? God lives on the road, under a tent, walking with us through life's deserts and pastures. God lives in the Scriptures, in the Good News we read and proclaim by our Spirit-inspired words and deeds. God lives in our relationships, for God is the very love we have for each other. God lives in the hurt. Most important, God lives inside of Mary. And us. With Mary, we have been given the perplexing gift of a mighty God who has seeded himself in us. By our tender care, we too give birth to the Hope of the World. *"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."* (Luke 1:38)

But what about all of God's fine houses? You know - the ones we've built in Rome and Canterbury and New Milford and Roxbury and Bridgewater. God may be at home in a tent, but we like our houses of cedar and stone! And it's Christmas. And St. Mark's - the church building - sits there, unattended in this season because of a pandemic. In need of the tender loving care we so want to give it. I'm not even sure what the greening of our church will be like this year. I'm sad, and I'm new to St. Mark's. I can barely imagine how those of you feel who have lived your lives in this place. The sights, the smells, the memories. I think the citizens of Whoville had it better because when the Grinch took all their decorations, presents and food, the people could still hold hands and sing. That's a bit harder to do masked and standing six feet apart. Perplexing greetings indeed.

By grace we will find a way through. Because God travels with us. God is alive in the scriptures. God dwells in our love for each other. And Mary is about to have a baby. Hear Gabriel's glad tidings: *"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."* (Luke 1:30) With Mary, we too are favored by the Most High. With her, we too have been chosen to receive his Son in our hearts. So that together we may form the Body of Christ that is his church and announce salvation to all.

By grace we are resilient. Creative. Adaptable. It may be a Christmas like no other, but it will be Christmas. In faith, and with hearts full of the hope and light of the Christ child in us, may we bear glad tidings that God's love wins all. Amen.