



Sermon: - 25th September 2016

I will dwell in the House of the Lord

Psalm 23, John 14: 1 – 14

Today we have welcomed Korey into the church family and we have said that this is now his home, as it is our home also. I wonder, do we think of this as our home? Do we feel at home here? What does it mean to feel “at home”, to be “at home” in the house of the Lord, or anywhere, indeed? I am in the curious position of not living in my own house but in one that goes with the job. In fact, for my entire adult life I have not lived in my own house; I live in a tied house.

I think No 10 Downing St must be the most famous tied house in the country. A tied house is unique. It's not even the same as renting a house because when you are renting you can live in the house pretty much as long as you choose as long as you keep paying the rent. For many years I could only live in my home as long as my husband was Minister of the Charge, and now I can only live in my home as long as I am the Minister of the Charge. Because between us we have ministered in so many parishes I have lived in several different houses during my adult life, but unlike many people I haven't actually chosen any of them. Some of the houses have been nicer than others, some have been more suitable for our needs than others, but the one thing that they have all had in common is that I knew when I moved into it that at some point, sooner or later, I would be moving out again. An interesting thing about it though, is that for the period of time I have been living in them, they have all been my home.

When I was a teenager growing up in the church, learning about faith and God, I came across a verse in the Psalms which was meaningful to me, and so I wrote on the first page of my bible. It's this verse that's on the screen now:

One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

When I finally understood that God was calling me into ministry and I answered the call, someone asked me how it felt. I answered, “It feels as though I have come home!” It seemed to me to be a fulfilment of that verse in the psalms that I had responded to all these years ago in my youthful enthusiasm. That ministry, for me, meant just that – living in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life, and enquiring in his temple, studying, learning about God. Home means many different things to different people. And for us here this morning it will mean different things. Korey is now at home in the church, we are all at home in the church. But what does it mean to dwell in the house of the Lord forever? We are not all called to be ministers. Perhaps the gospel passage gives us a clue. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places ... I go to prepare a place for you.

On the face of it this statement that Jesus makes is about the after-life; that when we die we will go to be with God and so he is preparing a place for us there. But for me it means something else as well; it means that there is room in God's world, God's church, God's heart, for everybody, of every race, creed, and colour. There are many dwelling places,

and Jesus will prepare a place for each of us. And if we link that back to the psalmist's suggestion that he would dwell in the House of the Lord forever, and my feeling of having come home into ministry, then it suggests that one way of understanding how we dwell in God's house is that we live in God's will. There is, as we are aware, a difference between a house and a home. Through necessity I have discovered how to be at home in whichever house I happen to be living, and also to be able to move on when the time comes to move to a different house. At each point David and I have moved in response to God's call. We have been moved by the Spirit to seek a new place to do the will of God and in that new place we have been able to make a home. We have discovered that living in God's will means being at home.

Those of us here this morning have found a home in the church. But there is a challenge to us in this also. If God has room in his heart, his world, for everybody then we also have a responsibility to welcome everybody into his house, the church, which is our home. The other day I was reading the autobiography of a pastor in America. She is the pastor of a particularly open and welcoming congregation where all sorts of people who have found themselves unwelcome elsewhere have found a home. She thought of herself as an open and accepting person. And so it came as a shock to her one day when she met somebody she knew she would struggle to welcome. Her instinctive reaction to this person was not positive. She wasn't as welcoming as she thought – she said, and to her shame, "If the quality of my Christianity is to be more inclusive than the next pastor, then things will get tricky, because I will always, always meet people that I don't want in the Church with me." It appeared that even she had limits to her ability to include people who are different. The truth is that however welcoming and friendly and open we think we are we all have limits and boundaries which we find it difficult to let go of, and if we think we don't perhaps it's because we haven't had to welcome anyone who lies outside those boundaries ... yet!

So the challenge is; can we here in Campsie become known as an open and welcoming congregation? We say we are. What does that mean in practice? Are we going to accept people into our midst who have been turned away elsewhere? Who are not like us? Who have been hurt and need to find the love of God but who have different standards and different approaches to life and faith? Are we going to allow God's love to spill out from us into our community, accepting people with whom we disagree and whom we perhaps dislike, because God has room for them in his heart?

If God has room for them in his heart, shouldn't we have room for them in ours and welcome them into the house of the Lord so that they too can enjoy him forever?