

Sunday Thought

18th July 2021 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

2 Samuel 7:1 - 14a

Psalm 89: 20 - 37

Ephesians 2: 11b - 22

Mark 6: 30 - 34, 53 - 56

God's House



Every Monday morning Sam came to tidy the church and sweep the front path. He was a little earlier than usual one Monday and was busy sweeping as children passed on their way to school. A young mother struggled by with her reluctant infant. She tried to urge him on with a warning word, *'This is God's house. He's watching you,'* whereupon the little lad turned to Sam and asked, *'Are you God?'* Sam was quick to respond. *'No,'* he replied. *'But I'll tell him you were asking after him!'* Mother urged her budding theologian onward to his day's studies!

King David, in our Old Testament scripture today was concerned about God's house. He spoke to the prophet Nathan about. I have rarely had to courage to repeat his words to church property stewards – *'I'm living in a far better house than God, and I'm not comfortable about it!'* Like Sam, Nathan refers the matter to the Lord and learns that, in time, there would be a Temple built of cedar like the king's palace, but it would have to wait for Solomon and the next generation. God also made it clear that while his people were on the move the place where he was to be worshipped and consulted was a tabernacle – a moveable Temple – a tent! The reason for this was *'I am God who is with you and who is always going ahead of you to the place where I want you to be.'*

I have worshipped in what could be described as tent churches – prefabricated buildings as well as sacrificially built mud-brick and thatch rooms. They were mostly erected with hope of a more permanent structure but also, like a tent, some would be easy to move on. The economics of the tent church could be appealing. Many attempts have been made at them, from inflatables to converted double-deck buses. They can be the church where God really is and more important, where people who most need him are found. We do not know how much time Jesus spent in the Jerusalem Temple or local synagogues, but I think, like his Father, he was more often to be found in town-centre, lakeside and hillside pulpits surrounded by a company who were not regulars in the usual places of worship.

Today's Gospel stories illustrate this.

Jesus saw his work as 'out there'. In the villages. In the places where ordinary people came looking for him. When his disciples returned from similar work in their village missions there was no time even to find a quiet place to talk with Jesus about how they had fared. More people had gathered before they could escape. When, eventually, they did cross the lake for some time together it was just the same. As soon as Jesus landed there was another crowd demanding his help. Driven by divine compassion his heart went out to them. Action led on to teaching and time sped by. Next, he was concerned about the crowd being hungry and with his men and women followers he set about catering arrangements. Finally, he renounced a night's sleep to rescue disciples in trouble on the windswept lake. And so, it goes on for Jesus and his crew. Next morning, and no doubt for many mornings, the crowds were still coming.

There are important truths here for us at present when many of us are re-thinking the 'church' which has been missing from our lives for nearly eighteen months. Where is God to be found and worshipped? Where can we best find a closeness to God as it all starts again? I believe we shall find him more 'out there' in the tent of a needy world than 'in here' with repetitive hymns and songs. This drew me to think again about our Methodist origins. Although John Wesley never wanted to start a new Christian denomination, his knowledge of Jesus took him to God's tent where ordinary folk were seeking him and his message of the life-changing experience of God's saving grace in Jesus. That meant preaching in the open air and other public places, visiting prisons and accompanying condemned criminals to the gallows, caring for the sick – including with his own remedies and even some new electrical therapies!

Question One on our agenda for the future has to be 'Where is God?' We may find he's not where we thought we'd left him!

One concern about a tent church occurred to me while reading today's words from Paul. It's a great scripture passage in which he speaks of our unity in Christ. We are all one people in spite of denominational differences, and regardless of race or sex or class... He says we are grounded on the foundation of God's words and bound together in Jesus as one spiritual body where God lives and works through the power of his Spirit. My concern? That with a tent-church, or double-deck bus church, every time we had a falling out in the church council, someone would move the tent or drive the bus round the corner to create a new pitch with their own name alongside God's!

A Prayer (from Psalm 89)

Lord, our God, we believe you make the same promises to us which you made to your faithful servant King David.

We too believe you are our Father, our Saviour and Protector. We know you will always keep your promise to care and provide for us, as we remain faithful to you.

Once again we give you our love and loyalty.

