

SERMON ~ BIBLE READING: 1 KINGS 8:1-13, 62-66

GOD'S GLORY IN THE TEMPLE

The Ark of the Covenant was a beautifully crafted, ornate and sacred box which contained the two stone tablets God had given Moses – the covenant box. It was a reminder to the Israelites of who God is – “I am the Lord your God”; of what the Lord their God had done for them – “who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves”; of how he expected them to live and behave – the Ten Commandments; and of the covenant or special relationship they enjoyed. During their desert wanderings the Ark of the Covenant was housed in a special sacred tent which is given the fancy name “Tabernacle”. A cloud, a symbol of God’s presence, always hovered over the tent and it was only when the cloud lifted that they moved camp. So there was no permanent site for the covenant box. David had wanted to build a temple for worship and to provide that permanent site; but this task fell to his son, Solomon. Today’s Bible readings bring us to the day when the finished temple is to be dedicated and the Ark of the Covenant brought to its permanent site in the temple. With the covenant box in place the priests are on the point of leaving when a cloud fills the temple, the same cloud that has earlier filled the sacred tent in the desert. This is the visible symbol of God’s presence. The temple is where God will live among his people.

Yes, the Lord lives in heaven but he makes his presence known to his people on earth. Though awesome and majestic, God is not remote, but near. The writer of the fourth Gospel tells us that Jesus came to live among ordinary people – he ‘pitched his tent’ among us and moved into our neighbourhood.

PRAYERS IN THE TEMPLE

Solomon praises God because he has kept his promise – he has succeeded his father as king of Israel and built the temple – and he continues this theme in his dedication prayer. Solomon knows God is too great for this building to contain him, but the temple is a place to meet with God, a place of prayer – and Solomon asks God to hear their prayers and forgive the people, eight times asking God to listen to his people.

Like Solomon and the people, we need God’s forgiveness and intervention. It is not that the place where we praise and pray is important, but that those who love God should worship him together, so there has to be a meeting place, whether it is in a school, a church, a house or even in the park!

CELEBRATION IN THE TEMPLE

Solomon and the people unite in celebration to God for he is the faithful one. They actually **want** to worship God and he is pleased to make his presence known.

Just as we should follow Solomon and the people's example of prayer, we should also follow their example of exuberant, extravagant celebration of God and his presence with us! Nowhere in the Bible does it tell us that church services must be dull affairs!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

On the north coast of Scotland stands a castle that used to belong to Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. If you went to the village near the castle you would meet an old man at the village garage. He would tell you how the Queen Mother would come to her castle every summer. While she was there, she always visited the garage to say 'Hello' to Tom. She also paid visits to several elderly folk living in small cottages nearby. All the villagers looked forward to the Queen Mother's coming. They loved her and would tell visitors about her visits to them. The Queen Mother honoured those people by gladly going into their homes - homes that were opened to her as a mark of honour to her. God is so much greater and yet he honours us by being present with us! This should thrill us!

GOING DEEPER

Questions on the Bible passage and sermon for you to think about during the week, either on your own or in a small group:

1. In Revelation 3:20 Jesus is outside the church, knocking on the door. How can we ensure that God is actually in and being honoured by all activities in the life of our church?
2. We talk about celebrating the Lord's Supper (or Communion). Is 'celebrate' the right word? If so, how celebratory is your church's sharing of the Lord's Supper? How can we honour God in our everyday lives? Think specifically about your own daily routine.