

Explorations for an AGM at Scots
23 August 2015

1 Kings 8: 22-30, 41-43

Sacred Place

What was the temple for? It was a sign that God was indeed dwelling amidst the people of Israel. "My name shall be there" After all their wandering in the wilderness building it showed that their journey with God was over. The ark, symbol of that wandering now resided in the place where God's name was.

Solomon said that the temple was to be a place where all, foreigners included could come and place their petitions before God. That can only be done in an atmosphere of safety. Temples and churches have long been held to be places of sanctuary.

It is important to recognise the need for sacred space, that is, space that allows a person to touch the holy, to be made whole, to be healed.

As the temple developed, it shut out foreigners, and women, and the imperfect and deformed. It developed an inward focus and worship that was inwardly directed, demonstrating values and visions that were far wide of the mark God had set for them.

Temples sometimes get their purpose diverted into maintaining their structure so they become enterprises existing for their own sake. They focus on drawing in people to be like themselves and attending to housekeeping.

Another aspect that is sometimes lost is the sense of sanctuary. Each area in the temple had a threshold, a boundary, within which a person could feel safe, at least while they were inside that area. By our use of this space we can help or hinder people in their search for thresholds in their own daily lives.

A key question for housekeepers is "Why are we keeping house?" Good housekeeping is never an end in itself. Does our worship and our care for our buildings get in the way of or does it help people gain a sense of the presence of God in their lives?

The way we use our space can signal to the wider community the importance how to find enrichment of the heart and the means for holding life together.

Ephesians 6: 10-20

Sacred Way

This passage seems like a formula for a framework for living. Formulas are tricky things because they can be used in two main ways. The first is as a prescription. This is the way to do it, and if it doesn't fit, then something must be wrong with you. However, that approach ends up making people feel guilty when they don't measure up, don't fit the formula. Rather than freeing people to follow Christ, they enslave people and put them in thrall to a false image of a demanding authoritarian God.

We know that what you say and think about yourself affect the way you live your life. We also know that living in harmony with what you say your life is about is a very powerful witness to those who are in relationship with you.

The second approach to these life formulas is that they are the framework for developing your own full life in community together. That is particularly so in this reading which goes back to an earlier piece about being imitators of God. The writer then talks to the community, then to the life of families within the community, wives, husbands, children then slaves, and finally masters. Then he comes back to addressing the whole group about some general principles.

In recognising that following Christ is not a simple or easy task, the writer likens the Christian lifestyle to that of a soldier. However, the armour the Christian puts on in the strength of God is of a different type.

For protection truth and justice-compassion. These two are about living in relationship with God in such a way that we live a life that is just and fair to our neighbour. This is our calling as we follow God's way.

We wear boots of the good news of peace, hold the shield of faith before us, and wear the helmet of salvation, a mind committed to liberation from injustice. What is the good news of peace today in our daily living with each other that we must put on?

We wield the Word of God as our sword. They understood that Word to be an all creating word, a life giving word, a word which when spoken, accomplished what it uttered. All these things are a means to put us into relationship with other people, into relationships that are nonviolent, that create wholeness and healing, peace, justice and hope.

And to sustain us in the way of following Christian, we need prayer, prayer that keeps us faithful.. That makes our way a sacred way, lived in the power of God to bring the gospel of peace.

John 6:56-69

Sacred Life.

What is the image of Jesus that fires your imagination? The shepherd, the rebel, the teacher, the healer? Or how about John's pictures? The door, living water, the true vine, the bread from heaven? What does it mean to say I am the door, or I am the true vine? Those are not jobs, or categories that make sense even. Perhaps it's no wonder people got angry, gave up trying to get a handle on him and left.

Jesus turns to his remaining disciples and asks them whether they want to go also. There is a certain plaintiveness in Peter's reply: "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We know you are the Holy One of God."

Being with Jesus they had found liberation from how they expected to experience God. In that liberation they were offered eternal life, life in God's time. That is life lived in the here and now in the power of God's Spirit. The promise is not one of never dying, but is of health and wholeness. In Jesus the disciples experienced what it was to live in a healthy relationship with God. With that healthy relationship comes a holy lifestyle, holy or whole, where spirit, mind, and body work and play together.

How else can we find the images that bring wholeness? Jesus gave images of food that nourishes and drink that brings gladness. In a world that is searching for the true images that bring health and wholeness, have we from our experience of God, and of Jesus got anything to offer them. Bread from heaven, not from New World. Living Water not Eternal Spring. The true Vine not the Real Thing. True food for the soul gives eternal life, and Jesus has it, and that's all that matters isn't it.