

Sermon Notes from CMJ
13th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

RCL Readings – 1 Kings 8:22-30, 41-43; Psalm 84; Ephesians 6:10-20; John 6:56-69

ACNA Readings – Joshua 24:1-2, 14-25; Psalm 16; Ephesians 5:15-33, 6:1-9; John 6:56-69

Introduction. Where was God before he made heaven? Did God make heaven so that he had somewhere to live? Of course not, and yet we often associate heaven as the home of the Lord. Since the Creation, God has always sought to dwell with mankind. We read that, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And then he promptly left heaven and came down to earth to walk with Adam in the garden. Why? Because the Lord has always desired a close personal relationship with his creation.

Common Theme. Many of the readings this Sunday revolve around the question, where does God dwell? Jewish exegesis has looked at this question and sourced the answer from Exodus 25:8. God instructed the Israelites to construct a Tabernacle but did not say he would reside in the Tabernacle! Instead, the verse says God wanted to reside in them, the people.

1 Kings 8:22-30, 41-43. During the dedication of the Temple of Solomon, it would have been inappropriate for the king to go inside the Temple as that area was reserved only for chosen priests and Levites. Thus we read that Solomon begins his prayer before the altar of the Lord. Today most people pray with closed eyes and folded hands and perhaps in a kneeling posture with head bowed. Solomon took the common posture of prayer in the ancient world; he stood and extended his arms, hands open to heaven in a gesture of openness and readiness to receive an answer. Solomon knew full well that God, the King of the Universe, would not dwell inside the Temple that he had built. That is not the same as denying that the very real presence of the Lord was manifested in the Temple, for previously they had all witnessed the Glory of the Lord in a cloud descend and fill the building. Solomon had declared that not even heaven could contain God, yet he would also declare several times in his prayer that heaven was God's dwelling place. The passage reveals the unexplained tension when contemplating the question, where does God dwell? God is too great and awesome to be contained by heaven, yet he has a special presence associated with heaven. Similarly, the Temple was a building even smaller than heaven, yet God's name was attached to and associated with the Temple. Solomon knew that the presence of God in Jerusalem would attract foreigners to the Lord, so Solomon asked humbly for the Lord also to hear their prayers. The Temple would indeed become a house of prayer for all nations.

Psalm 84. Psalm 84 is written by the Korahites, the sons of a rebellious Levite who challenged Moses in the desert. One of the tasks of the Korahites was to carry the Ark of the Covenant when the Israelites moved camp in the wilderness. According to the book of Chronicles, they continued to serve as 'doorkeepers' in the Temple. The psalm begins with the worshipper praising the place where God dwells. Initially, this was the Tabernacle in the desert, but for the pilgrim heading to Jerusalem for one of the Feasts of the Lord, this would have been the Temple. The appreciation of the Temple went further than mere physical beauty; there was also a spiritual desire to be with God. The psalmist writes, 'My soul longs for the courts of the Lord'. The Temple was the place where the worshipper met the 'Living

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God'. There, in the presence of the Lord, the psalmist declares the nature of the relationship: 'My King and my God'. God has always wanted a relationship with his people. His desire is to be with us, and our longing desire should be to be in his presence. The relationship that emerges from a mutual dwelling together is not something passive or static. We progress from 'strength to strength' in the presence of God.

Ephesians 6:10-20. This chapter in Ephesians is a popular passage for those who study the idea of spiritual warfare. If we look carefully, we notice that Paul does not invite the Ephesians to enter into the realm of spiritual warfare. Instead, he simply states the principle as fact. The Ephesians do not enter into spiritual warfare as they are already engaged against things 'not of flesh and blood'. For Paul, the real enemy was not something physical in nature but something that was metaphysical. The concept of Christians donning armour is not a call for temporal militarism, as the image of the armour of God is also metaphysical and spiritual. Interestingly, the metaphor of the armour of God is not unique to the New Testament. It also occurs in other Second Temple Jewish literature like the Wisdom of Solomon 5:17-20: 'The Lord will take his zeal as his whole armour and will arm all creation to repel his enemies; he will put on righteousness as a breastplate, and wear impartial justice as a helmet; he will take holiness as an invincible shield and sharpen stern wrath for a sword'. Wisdom of Solomon is building on the imagery of God's own armour in Isaiah (Isa 11:5, 49:2, 52:7, 59:17). It is likely Paul was familiar with this material and adapted it nicely for the Ephesian community.

John 6:56-69. The lectionary has had us focus on the teaching of John 6 for the past five Sundays. That is a lot of time to spend teaching on the 'Bread of Life'. It shows us how important it is and that it deserves our reflection, attention, and study. The teaching of Jesus about 'eating and drinking his body and blood' was a difficult concept for the Jewish followers of Jesus to comprehend, and it remains difficult for Gentile readers to this day. The passage notes that many disciples could not work through what Jesus was saying and stopped following him. Jesus knew that his teaching was offensive to some, as he says, 'Does this offend you?' Still, that didn't make him change his teaching. Jesus does not teach to please; he teaches to give life. This is something we have to work through.

In Jewish tradition, you worship God with your five senses, not just by singing and hearing a sermon. For example, incense (not a Catholic invention; see Exod 30) helped the worshipper praise God with the sense of smell. This is an aspect of worship we have lost in much of the Protestant tradition. In the Temple sacrificial system, the majority of the sacrifices were consumed by the worshipper as well as the priest. You worshipped God by eating with him. We also worship God during Communion, the Eucharist, engaging the sense of taste with bread and wine.

In the introduction, we started with the question, where does God dwell? He dwells within us. Expressed through elements of bread and wine, Jesus says he will abide with us and we abide with him. How can God, the King of the Universe, dwell within us? That is the same mystery that Solomon pondered. It is a

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beautiful mystery, God coming down to dwell with Adam, journeying with his people in the wilderness, dwelling in the midst of a nation in Jerusalem, and now dwelling in the hearts of his followers from all peoples all over the world. Truly, how lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts!

ACNA Addendum

Common Theme. The readings of the ACNA lectionary have a very different focus this week. The common theme concerns obedience to the Lord and service to others.

Joshua 24:1-2, 14-25. Following the conquest of the land of Canaan, Joshua gathers the leadership at Shechem and makes a covenant with the people. This is a little known covenant in the Bible. Perhaps it is because it does not contain any of the flashy signs and wonders that we find in Exodus. People just talk and pledge their obedience to God. Joshua himself will profess loyalty first with the well-known passage, ‘As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord’. Joshua reminds the people that their forefathers were pagans but now they are with the Lord. He gives a warning about the danger of falling back into idolatry, and the people respond with a voluntary oath to be loyal to God. The covenant that Joshua is making at Shechem is different from the covenant at Sinai. This covenant at Shechem is completely voluntary. There are no miracles, no fiery mountains, no wonders of the Red Sea, no voice of God which might help persuade the people to pledge loyalty to God. The people are reminded of their sacred history in which God called them to be a chosen people. Now the people need to freely and voluntarily choose to serve God.

Psalm 16. Psalm 16 is entitled a ‘Miktam of David’, which is also the title of Psalms 56-60. Unfortunately, the meaning of the word has been lost to history. The Septuagint translates the word to mean an inscription on stone, which is not all that helpful. Perhaps David wrote the psalm during one of his times of trouble, as it begins with a call for preservation. However, it is also a beautiful prayer in which David declares loyalty to God by simply stating, ‘You are my God. Apart from you, I have no good thing’. Loyalty means that you know that God is not simply God, but that he is your God. Loyalty and obedience are personal qualities. David knew the Lord as ‘my Lord’, and the psalm reflects some of the good things that come from having a relationship with the Lord, including good counsel and instruction. Verse 10 describes a further benefit of choosing loyalty to God in that David had confidence in the world to come. David had the hope that his soul would not remain in Sheol but that the relationship he has with the Lord endures after death.

Ephesians 5:15-33, 6:1-9. Much ink has been spilt over the concept of submitting to one another – particularly in the relationships between married couples. Let me begin by using a Hebrew exegetical method called *derech hashlili* (דֶּרֶךְ הַשְּׁלִילִי), meaning *to express the negative*; that is, explaining something by describing what it is not. For example, if asked to describe God, you could answer by saying that God is not a tree. Submitting to one another does not mean that there is no concept of

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authority or position in the body of the Messiah. The Ephesians could not write to Paul and say, ‘Thanks for the teaching on submission now; you submit to us and we will start teaching you’. Paul still claimed authority, such as in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. We still have teachers, evangelists, pastors, and shepherds, etc. in the Kingdom of Heaven. Voluntary submitting to each other is in contrast to forced obedience; it is a practical action that brings blessing and unity. There is a mutuality in the relationship between husbands and wives. Each partner has a responsibility and a duty to the other. Note, women in general are not being told to submit to men in general, nor the other way around. This passage is in the context of a marriage relationship. The motive for submission is the Lord, or as Paul says, ‘as to the Lord’. Christian marriages are not the same as secular marriages. No one should think that they are. God is involved and he makes his dwelling within the sacrament of marriage. Paul says, ‘This mystery is profound’. The Kingdom of Heaven involves a lot of submitting. Jesus gave us the example we should follow. He submitted to his parents; we submit to God and also to each other in love and service.

The Hebrew Bible commands parents to teach their children. It also commands children to honour their parents. Here, Paul quotes the commandment as he urges children to obey their parents and the instruction that they give them. No one seems to need to teach children to disobey; we all seem pretty good at disobedience. Loyalty involves obedience and submission. If we are loyal to God, we obey him. If we are loyal to our marriage partners, we submit to them. If we are loyal to our parents, we honour, obey, and submit to their instruction. Slaves also must continue the practice of loyalty and obedience.

The biblical view of slavery is another one of those long debates with lots of disagreements. The words, ‘as you would Christ’ should add perspective to the issue of loyalty, slavery, and obedience. Masters and slaves should have a different relationship with each other in the Messiah. That does not mean that authority and responsibility have been dispensed with. Rather, all our relationships with each other should be tempered by the loyalty and love we profess to give God.

About the author. The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master’s program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.