

Year A Proper 30 25th October 2020

Lev 19 v1&2, 15-18

1 Thes 2 v1-8

Matt 22 v1-8

May the words that I speak and the thoughts of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

HOME

You might wonder how this word jumped out at me from the bible readings we listened to this morning

I'm not quite sure either.

When I was a child and we were about to go out my mother would announce this to everyone and then seem to spend ages doing other things. After a while my father would go off to another room at the front of the house and start to play the piano. One of his favourite tunes came from the American composer, Stephen Foster "wherever I wander, wherever I roam there's no place like HOME"

In our gospel reading Jesus is still arguing with his religious opponents. There were various groups of these who each had different theological interpretations of the Biblical text.

Not so different from today with our various religious denominations.

One thing that the Jews could agree on however was that God was with them wherever they were on their journey through life.

They didn't have to be in a particular building or even in a particular country.

Since the time of the patriarchs they believed God travelled with them.

When Moses led the people out of Egypt they felt God was leading them to a new and special home land. However, the journey took 40yrs although they didn't realise it was going to be that long and they met many challenges along the way. Not unusually then, they started to get disheartened and even wondered if their life in Egypt hadn't been so bad after all.

To keep them together Moses delivered the 10 commandments to them and they made a box to keep them in, it was called the ark of the covenant. From then on they carried the box with them where ever they went and even made a special tent to keep it in.

For then this tent and the box with the commandments inside represented God's presence with them.

Later they gave the box and its contents a permanent home when King Solomon built the first Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple became important for Jewish worship and particular special occasions and Festivals.

The arguments Jesus was having with the religious leaders took place there in the outer courtyard.

However, for most of the Jews their worship did not take place in the Temple but in the small synagogues in the towns and villages scattered throughout Israel.

But there was another equally important place for worship and that was at HOME

When Jesus is asked the question about which is the most important law he alludes to this in his answer.

The first and most important commandment is found in Deuteronomy Chap 6 v4-9 and in our O.T reading this morning from the book of Leviticus.

Deuteronomy says

“Hear O Israel the Lord our God is one God. You are to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”

This is the Shema the Jewish statement of Faith which they repeat every day.

And it continues “you are to fasten [it] on the door posts of your houses or homes”

Why would this second statement be such an important commandment?

Well for various reasons

It was where all the family could be together to worship God as they lived their daily lives doing the chores or just relaxing.

A hymn by George Herbert put the living of our ordinary lives at home in the context of serving God

I'm sure you are familiar with it

“Teach me my God and King

In all things thee to see

And what I do in anything

To do it as for Thee

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine
Who sweeps a room, as for Thy Laws
Makes that and the action fine

Alongside this I have a picture of my previous Rector, still in his cassock on a Sunday morning, broom in hand sweeping the new church hall floor.

Many of the Jews at the time of Jesus did not have a synagogue anywhere near them and even if they did the women of the community would not be allowed inside.

Their HOME was the only place where they could all worship together.

In the home the women often led the worship-- for example every Shabbat was announced by the mother of the home praying the welcoming prayer and lighting the candles to bring in the day set aside for the worship of God.

To have the Shema inside it's box called a Mezuzah, on the door post ,reminds the family as they go out into the world God goes with them but also as the return he is with them in their HOME well.

Each member of the family would touch or kiss the Mezuzah as they came into the house. Just as you would greet a member of the family who was already there.

This is a Mezuzah you can see the scroll inside it.

Pete and I have found Mezuzahs on our hotel bedroom doorposts when we have stayed in Israel -- in other words our temporary HOME

As we have all had to observe lock down and still have restrictions placed on our movements HOME for us has become even more important.

We are very fortunate that we live in such a beautiful part of the world and have warm and comfortable HOMES . It has been difficult for many of us to come to terms with the fact that we can't socialise with family and friends. Nor is it possible for some of you to be able to come to church. But thanks to modern technology we can keep in contact by phoning each other, writing letters [which I had almost stopped doing] or by Zoom.

We are all joined together this morning -- those of you at home but still present in our worship and the much-reduced congregation here in St James the Less.

We, like Pollyanna, still have much we can be thankful for.

When I was teaching my pupils about Judaism, I used to show them the Mezuzah and then get them to make one out of the cardboard packet that a tooth paste tube came in.

When they had done this they wrote out the Shema, put it inside, and took it home with them.

I'm not suggesting you should do this [of course you could if you wanted to], but that we should remember the first commandment to love God with our whole heart and experience God's love for us every day as we spend our time

at home, and whatever we are doing however mundane ,
that he is always there alongside us. Amen