

Feb 5th 2023
Summerland United Church
Spiritual Affective Disorder: Little Altars Everywhere
Threshold

Where do you think God's "dwelling place" is? The Psalmist speaks of longing to be in God's "house." Indeed, being in what feels like a sacred place can transform and inspire us. Instead of thinking that finding God requires us to go to a designated place like our church, what if we created spaces that reminded us of the sacred wherever we are? Our worship series this season is designed to help us see our ordinary surroundings as sacred containers for spiritual connection. This week you are invited to create an "altar" in your home that can remind you that God dwells in all places.

Scripture: Psalm 84

Reflection: A Dwelling Place

How lovely is your dwelling place, the psalmist writes. My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of God. Psalm 84 has been called a pilgrimage psalm; a song to sing on the road to the temple in Jerusalem. The psalmist longs to be in the presence of God and to feel the warmth and comfort of God who is the sun and shield.

For the ancient Hebrews, there is only one place where God dwells and that is the temple in Jerusalem. This was where you went to pray, make sacrifices and have a connection to God.

This can be hard for us to understand because, for us, God is everywhere. God is found in all of creation and is present in all churches, temples, synagogues and mosques. We might go to a beach, a forest or a mountaintop to feel closer to God. And we also look within, we look for the Divine, the Holy that dwells within each of us. This is because at the time of Pentecost and when the Holy Spirit descended upon the followers of Jesus we became living temples, living dwelling places for God and the Holy Spirit.

We don't have to go far, or anywhere at all to feel closer to God, unlike the psalmist who was jealous of the sparrows and the swallows who built their nests in the rafters of the temple, therefore living within the dwelling place of God. Who felt the absence of God in their life when they were away from the temple and longed to go there again to sing with joy.

But I suspect that many of us may have experienced times when God felt far away. Where the presence of God was nowhere to be found, whether in creation or in a church. And perhaps we felt that absence as deeply as the psalmist.

What is it that keeps the presence far away? What gets in the way of us remembering the presence of God in our lives? I suppose there are many things. I could make a list

that is as long as my arm that take me away from God. And I would guess you can as well. We are after all human and we're easily distracted.

Which is why we have rituals. Why we have patterns in our faith life and why like the psalmist many of us come to church. These things help us overcome distractions. Help us to connect with God. So maybe the desire of the psalmist isn't so hard to understand after all.

Attending church and being a part of rituals in the community helps us connect to our faith and God. Today we are having communion, which I know many of you have been missing during these months when I've not been able to lead it. For many of us this will fill a longing such as the Psalmist describes in Psalm 84. It will for me.

I want to go back to the verses about the swallows and the Sparrows for a moment. The Psalmist says *happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise* referring to the birds that have made nests in the temple rafters. The psalmist wishes they could be like the birds ever present in the dwelling place of God, something they are not able to do.

However, because of our belief in the power of Pentecost, we have faith that God is in all places and anywhere and everywhere can be a dwelling place for God. This is why our simple spiritual practice for this week is an invitation to create your own sacred space within your home as a reminder that God is with you every day. Perhaps you will create your own little ritual to honour this place and honour God within your home. Lighting a candle or saying a little prayer. Whatever works for you and your own dwelling place.

Happy are those who sing your praise, the psalmist writes, then goes on to say, Happy are those whose strength is in you and finally at the end of the psalm happy is everyone who trusts in you.

May it be so, Amen.